Anniversary Number: Novelettes by ARTHUR STURGES HILDEBRAND and J. ALLAN DUNN

The Black Cat

ESTABLISHED 1895

October 1920

Twenty-fifth Anniversary Number

The Story of THE BLACK CAT

Short Stories
By

KENNETH PERKINS
GEORGE M. A. CAIN
RALPH E. MOONEY
HENRY LEVERAGE
A. HAMILTON GIBBS

20 CENTS

THE BLACK CAT MAGAZINE, INC., *Publishers*
229 WEST 28TH STREET, NEW YORK, N. Y.

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The Black Cat

Established 1895

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Twenty-five Years Old

The publication of this number marks the Twenty-fifth Anniversary of the founding of The Black Cat. It is dedicated to the memory of

HERMAN D. UMBSTAETTER

the founder of the magazine and for more than sixteen years its publisher and editor.

In assuming the ownership of the magazine in its twenty-fifth year, the present publishers approached the task of making a new magazine, distinctive in type, with the same enthusiasm that Mr. Umbstaetter projected a new magazine, distinctive in type, twenty-five years ago.

Conditions have changed. The old Black Cat has had its day. In its stead is a new magazine, and what appears in its pages proceeds from the initiative of the new publishers and is selected carefully to meet changed conditions.

The Black Cat is too young to be living in the past. No publication can endure that points with pride to past performance, but takes no consideration of the future or makes no attempt to live vigorously in the present. It does not wish to exist by virtue of the reputation made by its founder. But while adapting itself to present-day standards, it will not depart from the broad policy, with its absence of set rule, which made possible its distinction in the past.

Elsewhere in this issue may be found "The Story of The Black Cat," the material for which was gathered from the office scrapbook and from relatives and associates of Mr. Umbstaetter.

THE BLOCKADE RUNNER

By ARTHUR STURGES HILDEBRAND

Entered in the BLACK CAT *Novelette Contest*

DAY after day, standing siege! Esther saw no hope except in surrender to them, and surrender was terrible; yet as the days went by, surrender seemed to be coming nearer to her.

They thought her frail and weak; her great dark eyes, and the way her black hair fell caressingly across her temples, made her seem delicate, for all that her face was browned by the sun. Yet she could fit herself into the tarnished life of the sleepy little Maine seacoast town, keeping house for Uncle Owen, cooking —you should have seen her, with her sleeves up, working in the sunny kitchen —tending the garden, making patchwork quilts, going on straw rides and boating parties and husking bees; that was a proof that she was strong, really, and undefeated; in purpose, in impulse, she was a match for them. Realizing this, they were trying her by siege, rather than by direct attack. If they simply waited, letting the days pass, when she saw that there was no escape, would she not give in? They assumed it. They did not want to hurt her; no one would want to hurt Esther. Mark Valentine was too sly, too cautious, and Uncle Owen Forbes, for his part, wanted to be kind, so far as it was expedient.

"You look wretched, Esther," said Uncle Owen. The dinner things had been cleared away, and she was setting the table for supper. As she moved about the dining-room—they lived mostly in the dining-room—from the table to tht old sideboard, out into the kitchen, back again, absorbed in her work, moving swiftly, with deft hands, she seemed to have made a failure of happiness; there was about her an air of joyousness suppressed. Owen watched her from his armchair by the window, where he always sat, his whalebone walking stick between his knees, the Spring sunlight falling on his shaggy white head and shining on his shirtsleeves, looking out from time to time at the blue water of the harbor mouth between the sandspit and the point of woods. Owen had been to sea, years since, and he liked to watch the vessels coming in, if any ever came; he followed her with his eyes, and seeing the suppressed strength behind her grace, he was very wary. "You look real miserable," he said—"somehow. You're not going to be sick, are you?"

She smiled at him, bravely; she did not like to be reminded that the siege was slowly wearing her out. "No," she said. "I feel a little tired, that's all. I'm going out to play as soon as I've done my work. Out in the boat."

"I would," said Owen. "It's nice weather—lovely. It'll do you good."

He paused for a moment, reflecting on a move. "Must keep pretty, you know," he said, "if the men are coming after you." He fancied it rather subtle.

Esther stared, for a second, straight before her. She put down a cup unsteadily, so that it rattled in the saucer. She smiled weakly, but with no smile in her eyes, in protest and appeal.

"Mr. Valentine won't care for a girl that's sickly." He went on with it, smiling roguishly.

"I don't care what Mr. Valentine wants," Esther said.

Owen twirled his stick between his

hard rough hands. "Coming up to-night, is he?" he asked.

Esther went on arranging the knives and forks on the red-checkered cloth.

"I'm sure I don't know," she said.

The indifference of her tone was not lost on Uncle Owen, but he followed his lead. "So?" he said, teasing her.

"Oh, I don't care!" cried Esther. "I wish I would never set eyes on him again. I hate him. I've told you a thousand times. I hate him."

"Now, that's a pretty way to talk!" Owen was angry. "What's the reason you're so set against Mark Valentine, all of a sudden? I like Mark, first rate. What's the matter with him?"

"I don't know. I don't like him."

"He wants to marry you," Owen said.

"I don't care what he wants," she said. "I won't marry him."

"See here!" said Owen. "That'll do. Don't let's have any more of that kind of talk. He wants to marry you. And I want that he should. Haven't I brought you up and looked after you since your folks died, sent you to school and all? Haven't I? I want that you should marry Mark Valentine. Now let that end it."

"Oh, please!" she said. "Please let's not begin it all again. Please! I can't—with that dirty old hotel of his, and all the loafers. . . . I think he's an old—"

"Old!" Owen interrupted, pretending astonishment. Then he laughed. "He's thirty-eight. I shouldn't call that old. He's a right nice man. And he's rich. That hotel of his is a valuable property. He does well by it. Here he comes and offers himself, honorable and above board, and who do you think you are, I should like to know?"

Esther stood humbly before him. "I don't—I don't care for him," she said.

Owen looked sideways at her. It wouldn't do to get angry; no good in losing his temper. He didn't like to hurt her. "Well, I'm not hurrying you, am I?" he said. "You can take your time. Probably you'll get to care for him." Then he added, firmly, "But don't be so stubborn."

She turned away. "I won't ever get to care for him," she said.

"Don't be so set, I tell you. And don't talk back. Go along out and play, and see if you can't get rid of some of your foolish notions. I've got to go up town. And you get back by four o'clock. You hear me? Four o'clock?"

"Yes, Uncle Owen," said Esther.

She went out into the kitchen and stood for a moment thinking, trying to think. There was something that would help her, but that something—happiness, perhaps—seemed utterly out of reach. Owen was decided; he would take nothing but acceptance, and she had no acceptance to give. They were closing in, day by day—Valentine confident because of a promise to which he had no right, and Owen with his mind made up for acceptance. Esther took off her blue apron and hung it on a peg beside the pantry door. She stood with drooping head, her hands clasped before her against her black dress; the Spring sunshine, coming in through the vines that climbed about the kitchen window, poured over her, covered her. Outside, the birds were singing, as if to remind her. She tossed up her head, as if she were struggling for breath. Day after day—and she had no acceptance to give.

She heard Uncle Owen close the front door behind him; he went clacking up the road with his whalebone walking stick, his cowhide boots scraping in the dusty gravel. He was off for town—the wind blowing his long hair under the brim of his faded felt hat, his fingers clawing in his beard, reflectively—plodding energetically down the shaded road to town, a road that lead along between the silent white houses with the flowers in their dooryards, across the bridge at the head of the harbor, down to the open space, the "Square" where the flagpole was, and where the church and the black-

smith's shop and the hotel stood looking at one another under the high rustling elms. The hotel, the old "Okehampton House," was an unkempt brick building with a two-story porch across the front; the paint was peeling from the cornices, and the shabby cupola had sagged down into the mossy roof through rotting of the timbers. She knew that Owen would put in the afternoon at Valentine's hotel, swapping stories with the loafers at the bar, playing cards or checkers in the parlor with the idlers that congregated there to pass away the long empty hours, or sitting out under the porch with Mark. At some time during the afternoon he was sure to have a talk with Mark—to discuss the way affairs were progressing. Valentine, with his spyglass in his lap—musty old Mark, who seemed old, no matter what his years—and with him George, his mate and helper—George, so fat and greasily jovial, who kept the illicit bar, and always drank with the secret customers—and Uncle Owen, still playing with the head of his walking-stick—they would be sitting there, the three of them, with their pipes, their chairs tipped back against the worn brick wall behind them, the dogs asleep in the dust at their feet. Behind the white columns of the porch—the columns were scarred by the hubs of wagons—they would be sitting together, looking out across the road towards the sea, talking, drinking—yes, drinking openly, for George kept the bar and Owen Forbes was sheriff, and Mark Valentine was the magistrate, so that there was no one to accuse them—joking, perhaps, and smiling quietly, and nodding, over promises given and accepted, discussing the state of siege. That was the worst of it, the hardest to bear; for they would be discussing her. She hated the thought of that; she felt contaminated that a thought of her should pass through Mark Valentine's mind.

As she went down the cinder path that ran the length of the garden, the warm Southwest wind caressed her cheeks, stirred her hair, fluttered her skirt about her. A picket gate lead into the lane, a lane arched over with old willows, where the sun and the stars were darkened, and only twilight came. The willows made a cave, a tunnel, and at the end, where the grassy road sloped down to the shore, there showed only a circle of the blue water of the cove. She stepped lightly along, like the winds of Spring, down the lane and across a meadow to the sunny beach, where her boat was drawn up on the sand, at the edge of the magical sea. And for the time, it seemed as if the circle of the besiegers was broken, and she was free.

She put out in her boat, along the shore out of the cove. On one side the surf was growling on the long sandspit—there were rainbows in the mist above surf—and up at the head of the harbor was the town, its white church spire rising up, the roofs of its houses showing through the trees, and fair on the center, looking out over the gray old wharves, past the anchored fishing boats, the hotel. She could see the white columns of the hotel porch. She drifted with the ebb tide, her small brown hands lying idly on her oars, feeling the hot sunshine and the soft touch of the wind, free, almost from the circle they had cast around her. Owen was very insistent, for some reason that was hidden from her, and Mark—she shuddered, thinking what Mark might have in his mind. And the way to escape seemed out of reach. If only she could go on forever with the run of the tide, out to sea, where the waves were skipping, and the white sails of a far-off schooner made a shining spot in the blue. The breeze blew fresh along shore, across the sandspit, and the ebb tide ran strong through the harbor mouth. To go on forever was so simple—and so impossible.

It was nearly four o'clock. Esther started to row back. Taking up the oars was a cruel punishment, since she must

bring herself back to prison; they seemed to have contrived it so that she should be her own jailor. Owen had said merely "four o'clock," and she must go back, because of the virtue of obedience, into the state of siege. She felt broken, and helpless; she rowed mechanically, without watching where she was going. Suddenly the noise of the surf was much louder, and she saw the sandspit, with a quick glance over her shoulder, very close. The ebb tide was taking her out through the harbor mouth. She pulled more strongly, watching the trees on the point of woods, across the harbor, to see when she should begin to gain; finally she was rowing directly against the current, heading her boat up the middle of the harbor, towards the town. Over the stern was the sea, and the sails of the schooner, which had tacked inshore, shining in the sun. Close on her right hand the waves were rolling in on the sandspit, curling green, and white with the foam; foot by foot, though she pulled as hard as she could, it crept ahead. Perhaps they were watching her from the hotel, through the spyglass; at any rate, they did nothing; she looked back at the fishing boats that lay at the head of the harbor, near the wharves, which seemed very far away, but there was no sign of any boat putting off to her. She thought that she might land on the sandspit, and turned her boat towards it; instantly she felt herself swept on out to sea. She was frightened. She dipped her oar a dozen times in the same spot. The tide eddied under the keel of the boat, and gurgled against the planks. Now the sandspit was over the bow; she was pulling directly towards it. Perhaps she might come to land through the surf, on the outer edge. She pulled desperately, splashing, stroking deep, putting her whole weight and strength on the oars. But she came no nearer to the line of breakers.

And then, somehow, before she knew how it happened, one of her oars escaped from her hand. She threw herself forward on the bottom of the boat and plunged an arm after it—and missed it. Then she lost the other oar. She watched them go spinning away together. The boat swung into the trough of the waves, and began to roll heavily; a tin bailer in the bottom jumped crazily back and forth. "I am lost," she thought. The rote on the sandspit was not so loud now; the sea seemed all at once to become very quiet, empty, and impassive. Some seagulls were circling over the breakers, happily, swift as swallows. "I am lost," she said aloud.

But there, before her eyes, was the schooner. She was quite close now; Esther could see the white water under her bows. On the deck she could make out the figures of men; one at the wheel, and forward, leaning against the rail, another, who seemed to watch her. Did they see her? They must see her. "Come and save me," she said, over and over again. "Come and save me, come and save me, come and save me." She waved her arm, and watched, breathless, to see if they would notice her.

The man on the schooner raised his hand. Esther could see him turn his head, as if he spoke to the man at the wheel. And the schooner began to turn. She surged around and bore down. Esther was right on her course; she could see the high curving sails, all in line, and the white end of the bowsprit, pointing over her head. Down she came, thundering, roaring through the water—a small vessel, but she looked immensely tall. She came charging along, turning still more, heading so as to pass down to leeward. The man on deck crossed over and leaned out towards Esther; he was perhaps fifty feet away. "All right," he called. "We'll get you." The schooner passed. Esther had a brief vision of lines of chain, surging dizzily through the water, a high wall of wood, topped by a great anchor, red with rust, a lofty expanse of gray canvas, a flash of

cabin windows, a sloping stern, with letters on it, and the bubbling water of the wake. She was terrified, faint, thankful. The man at the wheel, as he passed, waved his hand to her; she thought she saw him smile reassuringly; he jumped around to the front of the wheel, put his hand to the spokes, and spun it. Round came the schooner, round till she was broadside on, round till her high bow hid her decks. She came leaning over a wave, another, another. She was moving more slowly; the foam under her forefoot died to a ripple; the bowsprit was soaring overhead. The air was filled with the thunder of the shaking sails.

Esther's boat was swept along beside that wall of wood. She saw a man leaning over the rail towards her. She put up her arms to him, and was caught, lifted, swung through the air, and set down on a firm and heaving deck. Without looking at her, the man said, "Got carried out too far, did you?" He was leaning over the rail again to clutch at the bow of her boat; he heaved it up, grunting with the effort, and slid it in on deck. Then he looked at her, and smiled; he wore a corduroy cap and a blue and white checkered jumper; a mahogany faced man, with twinkling eyes behind his glasses, and his smile was pleasant, and friendly. "Scary work, isn't it?" he said. Then, seeing how she stood speechless, swaying, he came and took her by the arm. "You're all right, you know," he said. "This isn't anything. Come and see the skipper." Esther walked unsteadily aft along the deck. The schooner was under way again, stamping down the waves, and the sails were quiet.

At the wheel stood the skipper. Esther looked up at him.

The skipper was a young man, sunburned and smiling; his white shirt, pressed by the wind against his big chest, was thrown open at the neck; there were lines of strength about his mouth, and there was mirth, gaiety, happiness, in his eyes. He seemed to be dominated by happiness, to be an embodiment of it. He was hatless, and his dark hair was tossed gaily back from his forehead. There he stood, looking at her.

Esther was not used to strangers. But could that be the reason that she stood still, so speechless, before the skipper? She did not like to be looked at so fixedly. But was it anger, as if at a rude stare, that brought the color to her cheeks? Did she tremble so because she had just been rescued at sea? She felt safe—and saved. She was grateful for that. But she could not speak; she could not move her eyes. Surely, never in her life had anything so lovely as this happened to her.

The skipper's eyes were fixed on her face, with so tender a regard, so frank an admiration, that she could not misunderstand, could not misinterpret it. He was standing at the wheel, swaying lightly to the motion of the schooner, as he sailed her—but he looked only at Esther. He was so sure of himself. Happiness—there was happiness in the way he stood on the deck, in the way his big hands wandered over the rim and spokes of the wheel, happiness in his eyes. Esther had never seen such a thing.

"I'm glad we happened to find you," the skipper was saying. "Lost your oars, did you?" His voice was deep, like the sound of breakers on a remote and friendly shore, but there was the note of youth in it, that quality of happiness.

"Yes—thank you—I was afraid you wouldn't notice me," she said.

"Not notice you!" The skipper laughed at that, showing his white teeth, and his mirth lighted up his face, but the happy admiration in his eyes was unaltered. "I'd notice you—anywhere."

Esther's heart fluttered. Did he love her? So soon?

She began to speak. "I was out in my boat in the harbor, and got caught in the tide, and couldn't make any headway. It

was clumsy of me to lose my oars, but—I was frightened. Can I go back with you?"

"Can I go back with you, you mean?" said the skipper. He called forward. "Bill!" he said. "Ease your foresail a turn." He pulled the wheel over towards him, and headed the schooner towards the mouth of the harbor. "And, Bill!" he called again. "Keep an eye out for shoal water." Then he added, to Esther, "This is new; I never expected to be coming in here."

"There's nothing to hurt you," she said, using a phrase of the sea as if to justify herself in his eyes, to forgive her clumsiness in losing her oars. "It's deep water," she said.

"You'd know the water, of course," he said gravely. "I'm Harry Kemp. That's Bill Page. We're from Nova Scotia. This is my schooner, from Weymouth, in St. Mary's Bay, the 'Go in Peace.'"

"Go in Peace!" repeated Esther. Her eyes shone.

"Like that name?" said the skipper. "I named her myself. My father gave her to me, last fall. He's an apple farmer. You should see the orchards in the Spring, when the breeze comes up St. Mary's Bay and sets the petals blowing."

Esther looked at him, but she did not know what she was doing. Never in her life had she known anything like it.

"I'll take you anywhere you say," the skipper said. "Perhaps somebody'll be worried about you."

"I had to be home by four o'clock," Esther said.

"You're going to be late, I'm afraid," Harry said. "Never mind; you can't help shipwrecks. I don't know your name."

"Kennedy," said Esther.

"Miss Kennedy." The skipper was smiling. "Why, I told you the whole of mine, and all about me."

"That's my boat there on the deck," Esther said, smiling too. "I row around the harbor in it, when I'm let off. I live with Uncle Owen Forbes; you can see the house, over the sandspit"—she pointed—"behind the willows. My name's Esther."

"Esther," said the skipper. He spoke like a man who holds a jewel in the palm of his hand.

Esther blushed.

"Esther," he said. "Will you show me the way into your harbor?"

She was delighted at that. "You go right in around the end of the sandspit," she said. "There's good water. Then you can haul into the cove, and anchor in the middle. There's good bottom."

"You are a sailor!" said the skipper.

They were close in now, flying past the end of the sandspit, where the tide was eddying. Esther went down to the lee rail, under the boom, to watch. Her hair was blown across her face, and she tossed her head. Harry had to take his eyes away from her.

"All right, are we?" he asked.

She nodded.

She turned back to him, patting gently with her hand on the schooner's rail. "I like this schooner," she said.

"That's good," he said.

"Go in Peace!" Esther murmured.

"Good going little boat she is," Harry said. "I love her."

Esther kept on patting the rail.

"Can we round in now?" Harry asked.

She started slightly, and looked around. "Yes," she said. "Shoot right up."

"Shoot up," said Harry, repeating orders, and whirled his wheel.

The Go in Peace rounded into the eye of the wind, and slipped smoothly into the quiet waters of the cove. "Bill!" the skipper called. "Clear away your starboard bower, and stand by the jumbo." The schooner glided slowly in, her canvas banging. The jumbo came tumbling down to the deck with a whirr and a rattle of blocks. When she had lost her speed, Bill let go the anchor; it plunged, and the chain roared out, sending up a

little cloud of dust from the rusty hawse-pipe. Harry left the wheel and went forward. Esther came too. Bill took in the foresail.

"A dandy little cove," Harry said, looking around him at the sunny shores. "Let's get this boat over, Bill," he said. "Esther's in a hurry." They slung the boat over the side. "And we'll have to let you take some oars, too."

Harry swung his feet over the rail, and dropped into Esther's boat. Bill came with a pair of oars, and passed them down to him. He stood looking up at her; there on the deck of the Go in Peace, in her little black dress, she looked like a princess.

She shook her head. It wasn't true; she was caught again; she felt unsafe. She clambered over the rail, gave him her hands, and stepped into the boat.

The skipper called back to the schooner. "You might take in the mainsail, Bill," he said.

When they landed on the beach, Esther said, "Won't you come up to the house? I—my uncle—he will want to thank you for bringing me back, if you have time."

"I'd like it," he said.

As they walked up through the lane, he seemed, Esther thought, to be conducting her, as she never before had been conducted; as if he owned her, as she had never before been owned; he was talking of Spring in his Nova Scotia orchards, where the petals were blowing, as if he were making plans. She felt safe again, as she walked beside him. But there was a conflict coming, she knew. Where was she to find the strength to win it?

At the foot of the cinder path—it lead up through the garden between lines of peonies and lilacs—Harry stopped, and put out his hand on the gate.

"Is this your garden?" he asked.

"Yes," she said. "Really it belongs to Uncle Owen, but I take care of it."

"It's the nicest spot," he said slowly, "I ever saw."

Esther put her hand on the gate.

"I never saw such a nice place," he said again, with the same deliberateness and emphasis. "I think that a man that was in love with you would come here to meet you."

Esther had not been expecting that—so soon. "After all," the thought went through her mind, "it's perfectly plain to both of us." But she implied, by her look, that there was no such man—who met her at the garden gate.

"I think he'd come," Harry said, watching her eyes, "along about eight o'clock to-night."

She was quite unable to handle that; she opened the gate, and they went in. "I'm late," she said. "I forgot. Uncle Owen will be back."

As they came up the path they saw Owen standing in the kitchen door. His hat was on his head, and he held his whalebone walking stick; evidently he had just returned, and found the house empty. He was staring hard at Harry from under his shaggy brows. He was angry, and apprehensive; the skipper was walking beside Esther in a way that offended him. When they came close, he stepped aside in the doorway, as if it was his intention that Esther should go at once into the house, and leave him to attend to the young man.

"I'm sorry, Uncle Owen," Esther began.

"It's pretty near half-past five," Owen said.

"I got carried out by the tide, and I couldn't row against it, in spite of all I could do. And then I lost my oars, somehow. I drifted out, and the schooner picked me up and brought me back. This is Captain Kemp."

Harry smiled up at Uncle Owen, and held out his hand. Owen ignored it.

"I'm glad to meet you," Harry said.

"I'm not very glad to meet you," Owen said. "And I don't want to see you again, either. Keeping my girl out late."

"But—Uncle Owen," Esther objected.

"You go in the house," Owen said. "And you," he added to Harry, "can go back where you came from."

Esther turned back in the doorway; it was a look that Owen did not see, a look that she would not have dared to let him see—a dedication and a promise. She went in.

"I'm sorry if I've made trouble," Harry said.

Owen growled—a roar, a bellow, that he had remembered from the old days at sea—and shook his stick, as if he were calling down imprecations on Harry's head, as if he were showing Heaven what a threat he could utter. Harry turned and walked down the path.

IN the evening Mark Valentine came up to Owen's. He felt danger in the air, and had come up to see about it. A lean man, Mark was—lean except in one particular—and quiet-moving; he seemed always to be coming sideways at things, instead of facing them directly. He put his thin sharp face in at the door and shifted his pale eyes around the room as if he were looking for an ambush. He greeted Owen, who was sitting in his chair beside the dining-room window, and asked for Esther.

"She's upstairs," Owen said. "She's shaken up, I guess. Not sick, you know, but shaken up. And no wonder! Out late, and trotting around with good-for-nothing sailors that come from God knows where! A great note!"

"What's that?" Mark said, in his thin quick voice. "What do you tell me? Not that Nova Scotia schooner that's come in?"

"You don't know the schooner, do you?" Owen asked.

"No," Mark said. "She's not one of mine; got no consignment for me, this time. They're sending the stuff over in most any vessel they can get, you know, these days, and they change around as much as they can, of course, so's they won't be suspected. I thought this might be a new one, with a load of—of stuff for me, so I sent George out, after supper, to make sure. She's the Go in Peace, from somewhere up St. Mary's Bay, coasting. Lord knows why he put in here!"

"I'd like to know!" Owen exclaimed. "Poking in here where he's got no business, and raising hob. What does he think we are, I wonder?"

"What did he do?" asked Mark.

"Kept Esther out late," said Owen.

"No! Not Esther!"

"Yes. She got fetched out by the tide, and lost her oars, or something, and this fellow comes along in his schooner, and brings her in. That's a pretty thing, isn't it. She brought him up here. . . ."

"What's that?" Mark cried. "She brought him here? You mean to the house, here? Did you see him?"

"Yes," said Owen. "Why not?"

"I don't like that idea very much," Mark said. "These strangers hanging around. The girl's got money, you know."

"Well, how's anybody going to find that out? She doesn't know it, herself. She thinks her father left all his property to me in trust for her till she was married—the money he had, and this house. You're going to fix it so's I can keep the house, aren't you? That was all arranged, once, and agreeable to both of us."

"Yes, that's all arranged. But supposing she was to marry somebody else? She'd start in to straighten out her affairs, and find out all about it. Where would we be then, I should like to know?"

"She's not going to marry this skipper, you know," said Owen. "I sent him flying out of here; told him to get back where he'd come from. We're through with him."

"You did, did you? Well, I suppose it's all right. But I was—just kind of—you know?"

"Oh, you fellows that are in love!" Owen grinned.

"Well, I don't like the idea. What sort of a looking man was he, this skipper?"

"Good looking young fellow," Owen admitted.

"There! You see?" Mark was almost triumphant at this proof of his right to be miserable.

"Oh, pshaw! You're worrying yourself over nothing, Mark. Say, you didn't bring anything with you, perhaps?"

Mark appeared to forget his suspicions. He took a flask out of his pocket, brought glasses from the sideboard, and the two drew up chairs to the table. Owen lighted a lamp, and pushed the dishes back to make a clear space before him on the cloth. Mark sat back, his legs crossed, turning his glass at arm's length on the table beside him; he kicked his foot slowly up and down, and looked up sideways in the air in a meditative manner.

"Why doesn't he get out, then?" he said, after a moment of silence. "What does he keep hanging around here for?"

Owen laughed. "Can't you let him stay in harbor over night? He'll go in the morning, fast enough."

"I hope so. If any of these young fellows come hanging around, I haven't got much chance," he confessed.

"Get out!" said Owen. "She's fond of you."

"Of course," Mark admitted, "Yes, of course. But it's going to be a hard job, just the same."

"It'll take time. That's only natural. What would you expect? Give her a few months more, and she'll begin to see that there's no way out of it, and she'll come round."

Mark emptied his glass, got up, and went to the kitchen door.

"Going so soon?" Owen asked. "Coming up to-morrow night? Esther'll be here."

"I'll be up."

"Where you going now?" Mark had started out by the kitchen door.

"Oh, I thought I'd just take a look around in back," Mark answered. "Somebody might be prowling around, you know." He peered out into the darkness of the garden.

"You've got that idea on the brain. You make me laugh. You won't find anything."

"Maybe not," Mark said.

THE starlight was shining on the cove, and the lantern in the rigging of the Go in Peace made a path of gleaming yellow on the water. The rote on the sandspit was a background of deep sound for the myriad little noises of the meadows; the crickets were singing, and the night breeze rustled the long leaves of the willows. Harry and Esther were sitting on the wall beside the lane. From the enfolding darkness they looked out at the dim blue and gold radiance on the water; their quiet voices made silence of the gentle clamor all about them. They had met, by the garden gate, at eight o'clock.

"It wasn't right for me to come out," Esther was saying.

"I knew you'd come. I knew you'd remember what I said."

"I didn't forget it, even for a minute," she confessed. "But it wasn't right."

"Not right! Who tells you what's right? Your uncle?"

Esther laughed softly. "Yes," she said. "But you know."

"I know," Harry said. "It's perfectly plain. And I don't care for your uncle."

Esther was startled by the glaring obviousness of it. Everyone would know—Owen, Mark, everyone in town. How was she to face it? How was she to find the courage to state it in all its glory, in the face of the solid amazement that would meet it? Her terms for it were so different from anything that she could make them understand! Yet it must be translated.

"What's the matter?" Harry asked.

"It's Uncle Owen," she said. "He doesn't understand."

"Well, he doesn't know, does he?"

"I don't mean about us. I mean. . . . Oh, everything."

"I know," Harry said. "It was like that with me."

"With you? But it's different with you. A man can just go away. You went away to sea, didn't you?"

"I didn't run away. Really, I live at home. But I get away to sea a good deal. Still, the sea is a lonely place; a man doesn't do well alone. Do you want to go away, Esther?"

"Yes, of course. I'd be sorry to leave Uncle Owen. But I'd rather be alone, anywhere. . . ."

"What does he do to you?"

"It isn't Uncle Owen," Esther said. "It's Mr. Valentine."

"Mr. Valentine! That man that runs the hotel?"

"Yes." She looked at Harry; in the darkness, she could just see his face. "He wants to—to marry me."

Harry laughed shortly. "Well," he said. "What of it?"

"Oh, I'm a wicked ungrateful girl! I don't want to marry him. I don't! I don't!" She was in the enemy's camp again, trying to fight them in their own terms.

"No, of course not," Harry said. Valentine! The boss of that rum-haunted hotel in town! Why, it was Valentine who had sent George out to investigate the schooner, to see if she had a consignment of whiskey. . . . The Go in Peace wasn't the first Nova Scotia schooner to anchor in Okehampton harbor! Bill Page had found that out; he had sized up George, and Valentine.

"I think you'd better marry me," Harry said.

Esther was silent. Her face was very white in the starlight.

"Esther, they can't really think that you are going to marry him? Can they? Why, don't they know that you have love to give?"

Esther shook her head. No, they didn't know.

"You're all love, dear. Why, if the one you wanted came and put out his hands to you, wouldn't you know, right off? Esther?"

Esther put her arms around his neck. He kissed her. He kissed her mouth, her cheeks, her hands, that she put up, half frightened, to try to stop him. He took her in her arms as if she had fallen from Heaven.

"Didn't I know?" Harry whispered. "Dear, didn't I know, the minute I saw you? Didn't I?"

"I knew," Esther said, pushing back in his arms so as to see his face. "I knew, the second I stepped on the deck of the schooner."

The garden gate clicked.

Esther started; she struggled to get away, but he held her tight. Then she realized that she had no need, for the first time in her life, to seek safety alone. She stayed quietly where she was.

A man, dimly seen, came through the garden gate, and started, with cautious steps, down the lane. He stopped to listen, and moved on again.

Harry put his cheek against Esther's. "Valentine?" he whispered.

She nodded.

Mark came past them, peering into the shadows under the trees. It was evident that his eyes were still dazzled by the lighted room he had just left, and that he could not see them. He passed no more than ten feet away, and stopped again, to listen. In the pale light that struck up from the bottom of the lane, they could see the white oval of his face, his collar, his hands; the rest was as black as the night around him. He stood very still for a long time.

Esther shrank into Harry's arms. It was a comfort to feel that he did not tremble. Tremble? Harry! How he could send Mark spinning!

He stirred, and put his fingers on Esther's lips. Then he cleared his throat loudly.

Mark jumped. It seemed as if his feet left the ground. At the same time he put up his hands, as if to ward off a blow. He coughed nervously, and set off down the lane, walking very fast, trying to make it appear that he was in a great hurry. Against the circle of light, when he came into it, they could see the outline of his figure, see him turn his head to look back several times over his shoulder. At the end of the lane he turned off out of sight, and took the path that led along the shore to town.

"Oh, Harry, you shouldn't. . . ."

"What's the harm? My, didn't he jump!"

"But, don't you see? He came out to look for me. Maybe they've missed me up at the house. And now he'll tell Uncle Owen."

"He didn't know who it was."

"I must go back. He'll make trouble now. He'll do something, just as sure. . . ."

"What can he do? Has he got anything to say about it?"

To Esther, Owen and Mark seemed very powerful now, aroused to new possibilities for injury. The final struggle had been precipitated. She had now so much more to lose than liberty; she had a secret very dear to her, and the secret was known to them; they would do some dreadful thing.

"It's your Uncle Owen that ought to be asked, I should think," Harry said. "I'll come up to-morrow night, and talk to him."

"Oh, yes, come!" Esther cried. "Try to make him. . . . But he won't hear of it. I know. He'll just say no. Oh, take me away from them. You don't know how terrible they are—the things they'll do! I want to go away with you. I won't ever be happy again away from you; ever in the world."

"Esther, dear! Of course! Do you think I'd let you go? Let me try to talk to him, and then, if talking isn't any good—dear, are you brave enough?"

"I'm brave enough, and I love you enough," Esther said, "for anything."

"Well then, what have we got to be afraid of?"

"But I must go back. To-morrow—oh. I can't see how I'm going to live through to-morrow! After supper I'll come out and meet you, and we'll go back together I can't let you go alone. I'll come out."

"I'll be here. But—everything is all right, Esther. What can they do? How can they stop us?"

Esther didn't exactly know.

The garden, as they came into it from the darkness of the lane, seemed filled with silver starlight. The house was dark. All was quiet; the flowers seemed asleep.

In the doorway she turned back to him again, to throw to him another kiss. Then she closed the door softly behind her, and Harry waited, there between the lines of drowsy lilacs, till the last faint creaking of her footsteps on the stairs had died away.

He sat for a long time on the deck of the Go in Peace. At last the church clock marked midnight; the tuneless bell came faintly across the water. "And so ends this day," thought Harry. "Well, it's to-morrow. Now we'll see."

MARK VALENTINE was sitting alone in the hotel barroom, in the afternoon, very nervous, trying to think out a bold plan of action, a plan that must inevitably succeed, but that would require no action from himself. He was used to working indirectly. Esther, even—he had been trying to capture Esther through the medium of Owen Forbes. And now he was trying to get rid of Harry through the medium of George.

The barroom door opened, and George came in. Mark turned to him eagerly.

"Well, George, well?" he snapped.

"Well, what is it? How did you make out?"

"All right," George said. He steered across to the bar, and poured himself a drink. "I planted it."

"Where?"

"In the hold, of course," said George. "That was where you wanted it, wasn't it? You want that they should find it, don't you?"

"I suppose so," said Mark sighing.

"I suppose so," mimicked George, lounging against the bar and tasting his drink pensively. "Well, Bill's going to find it. He's coming ashore again, after supper, to see me. I'll find out all about it."

"That's right. Make him drink a lot, George. Get him loosened up; the more he talks, the more evidence we'll have. How does he carry his liquor?"

"All right," George said. "But I'll get him soft."

"And where was this skipper?"

"Going to be ashore all day," George said. "So they tell me."

"All day!" cried Mark, alarmed, turning swiftly in his chair. "Doing what?"

"How the hell should I know," George replied.

"Well, watch yourself," said Mark. He glanced up at the clock, and went out.

In the hotel office, a dingy little cell fenced off from the front hall, two men were waiting for him. Mark greeted them curtly, and swore them in. "Special duty for to-night, boys," he said.

They stared innocently back at him; such special duty was no novelty to them. One was a farm hand, the other the blacksmith's helper; there was a childish look in their faces, but they were sturdy, powerful men. Mark looked them over approvingly.

"Now, Ned," he said. "I want you to show up here along about half-past seven. There's a fellow named Page—Bill Page. He'll be with George. Arrest him, and bring him up to Forbes's. Understand. And, Tim, I want you to keep a watch on that Nova Scotia schooner. Keep hid, at the foot of Forbes's lane. That skipper'll come down sometime, to go out aboard; when he does, arrest him, and turn him over. Keep hid, and watch the boat. Understand?"

Both understood their instructions.

"And, another thing," Mark added. "You'd better go armed." Then he dismissed them.

He spent the remainder of the afternoon in his own room, pacing the floor, trying to keep up his courage. He was confident. It was necessary that he should be confident. If he began to be afraid—no, no, everything was all right.

At seven o'clock he cleaned up, brushed his hair carefully, and went up the hill to Owen's. As he crossed the dooryard, Owen, who was sitting in the dining-room window in the twilight, waved his hand to him as a signal to come in. So far, then, all was well. He entered, closed the dining-room door behind, made sure that they were alone, and whispered, "Where's Esther?"

"Upstairs," said Owen. "She's got a headache."

"Damn it!" cried Mark. "Why does she keep having headaches?"

Owen couldn't answer that. Mark drew up a chair and sat down, leaning over to emphasize his remarks by laying a finger on Owen's knee. He wanted to get right down to business. Had he known it, he was wasting precious time in talk.

"This young skipper off the schooner," Mark said, "is a smuggler. He's got whiskey aboard."

Owen looked him in the eye. The question of whiskey was so well understood between these two! Mark Valentine was talking of smuggling? Was it safe? Was it possible to make a point, an issue, a source of strength, out of Mark's very weakness? Had Mark been clever enough to think out a plan, to evolve a plot, to dig a pit for someone,

when the very pit opened beneath his own feet? He looked long at Mark, in silence.

But during the silence, the faint creaking of the back stairs had ceased. Precious moments, wasted in talk!

"What's the idea?" asked Owen, finally.

"Simple. I've got a constable at the hotel, on the lookout for this Bill Page. He's going to arrest him, and bring him here, you being the sheriff. I've got another down at the cove, laying for that skipper. I know where he leaves his boat. When he comes, arrest him. See?"

"You're not going to prosecute him?" Owen asked.

"Prosecute! No. I'm going to accuse him. 'Young man,' I'll say, 'you've got whiskey aboard that schooner. You can't deny it. I've got people to prove it by'—and I have, too—'and I can make it pretty hot for you in this town, and don't you forget it.' Then we'll see."

"Sounds thin to me," said Owen.

"What's the matter with it? You want to remember that what I say, in this town goes. You want to remember that it's pretty ticklish business for a schooner from Nova Scotia to lay up in a harbor in the State of Maine, when the master hasn't any papers to show what he's doing here. What reason can he give? Who's going to believe what he says?"

"There's no conviction in it," Owen said.

"Who said there was? But it will scare him off, won't it? It will get rid of him, and I guess that's all we care about, isn't it?" Mark was prodding Owen's knee with every word. "Before he does any harm!"

"Why, how is he—"

"Listen, Owen. I didn't tell you all of it. Last night, when I went out to look for the sneaking devil—remember?—he was there! In the lane! He's up to some devilment, take my word for it."

"But what can he do?"

"I don't know, but it's best to get rid of him before he does any harm. Don't you see? Now, the first thing to do, is to tell Esther what sort of fellow this precious skipper is; that'll put a stop to that, once for all. Then we can deal with him. That's my idea." He got up from his chair, and strutted across the room. "Now, then," he added, pompously, "send for the girl, and let's tell her."

Owen was at once stirred to action. He rose and went through the parlor to the foot of the stairs. At the stairs, he paused. "I hate to disturb her, Mark," he said. "Why not—"

"No, no. Let's get it done. Who knows what hell there may be to pay if we wait. Let's do it now, before there's any harm done."

Owen went halfway up the stairs. "Esther!" he called.

There was no answer.

"Esther!"

Silence.

He went up and stopped before the door of her room. "Are you there, Esther?" he said.

The dining-room clock ticked off a few long seconds. Owen opened the door and looked in. The room was empty. He stared for a moment at the pale twilight falling on the bed. "Mark! Mark! She's gone!"

Mark, who had followed Owen to the foot of the stairs, wheeled back into the dining-room, and stood leaning his hands on the table, gasping and trying to stammer out his surprise. All his confidence was lost, all his arrogance—everything was lost.

Owen came running in through the door behind him, and clapped him on the back.

"Stir around, Mark! After them! They can't be far." He disappeared through the kitchen door. Mark followed, down the garden path and into the lane.

Then Owen, who was ahead, found Esther. She was standing very quietly in the middle of the lane, wrapped in a

black cloak—a cloak, in that black pocket of darkness, of invisibility. But Owen stumbled against her.

He caught her in his arms. "Here she is," he said. "Esther, Esther, what's this?" He spoke gently, because he was so relieved to find her alone.

"What's this?" Mark said, groping his way to them. "What's the meaning of this? Is this where you were going to meet him?"

Esther was thoroughly frightened. She had failed; all was lost. How could she ever hope that she could explain it to them? "Yes," she said.

"By God—" Owen began.

"Easy there, Owen," said Mark. "Keep still. He'll come, don't you see? He'll come to find her, and walk right into the trap. We've got him now. I wish Tim was here! Keep still; wait."

"Oh, Mark!" Esther made a pitiful protest.

"Keep still, I tell you!" Mark whispered. "Wait!"

They waited there in the dark, for several minutes. Owen was breathing heavily, enraged; Mark was shivering with excitement, but very keen; Esther was silenced by dismay. But she had heard Mark's words, and the terror they gave her brought back something of her courage.

Then there came a low whistle out of the dark. Owen started, and stared into the shadows, scowling; Mark crouched down, as if he were afraid that something would spring upon him. Then the whistle was repeated. It came from the head of the lane. They turned silently to face it.

"Answer it, Esther," Mark whispered, very low. "Whistle, or call, or whatever it is you do. Answer!"

Esther kept silent.

Mark moved nearer to her, threateningly. "Answer."

Suddenly Esther straightened. They heard her cloak rustle. "Harry!" she called, in a clear low voice. "Harry! Go away. They're here; there's a trap. Don't come, Harry!"

Mark caught her by the wrist. "Shut up!" he whispered. He twisted her arm so that she cried out with the pain.

There was a sudden commotion in the ferns at the head of the lane, and Harry stepped out quickly and came towards them. He caught Mark by the arm. "What are you trying to do?" he said.

Mark almost screamed. "Take your hands off me!" he cried. "Stand back! Don't you touch me!" But he dropped Esther's arm.

"What the devil do you mean by this?" thundered Owen.

"You're under arrest!" Mark cried. "I arrest you!" He was almost incoherent from his excitement.

"What for?" Harry asked.

"For smuggling whiskey, that's what," Mark said. "I'll show you!"

"It's a lie," said Harry.

"You'd say so, of course," said Owen. "Oh, we'll see about that! You march along up to the house now. March!"

"Harry!" Esther whispered.

"It's all right, Esther. They can't do anything to us."

"Oh, can't I? Can't I? I'll make it hotter than hell for you, young man! March, now!"

They started up the garden path, Owen ahead, supporting Esther, who stumbled on beside him, and Mark and Harry in the rear. They walked in silence, except that Harry said, "Don't be frightened, Esther." The four came into the dining-room, blinking in the bright lamplight.

In the parlor doorway stood Ned, the blacksmith's helper; seated at the table, his legs crossed, leaning back in an easy attitude, was Bill Page. He smiled up at them from behind his glasses as they came in.

"You're under arrest," said Mark.

"So I see," said Bill.

"What's this all about?" asked Harry.

"You're smuggling whiskey," said

Mark. "Don't deny it. I've got people to prove it by. . . ."

Bill threw up his shoulders in a contemptuous laugh.

"Harry!" Esther cried. "It's a trick!"

"You go upstairs where you belong, young lady," Owen said severely. "You're not in this. This skipper is a smuggler. Do you hear? A smuggler!"

Esther flushed. "It isn't true," she said.

"Never you mind about that," said Owen. "You go on upstairs. You've made enough trouble, I should think, for one night."

Esther was faltering; because Harry was facing Mark, who was accusing him, she felt left alone. Everything seemed to be melting away around her, and she was on the edge of tears. "But . . ."

"Hush your noise, I tell you!" Owen shouted.

Harry faced about and looked at Esther. "Dear," he said, "are you brave enough?"

The sudden light in Esther's eyes was answer to that; instantly she was transformed; her timidity vanished. The hood of her cloak had fallen back, and the lamplight touched her cheeks and shone in her eyes. Across the room, before them all, so bright, so radiant that the wonder was that they should not see it, she flashed her love to him.

Harry went on speaking, with eyes that saw nothing else in the room but hers. The others stared at him, trying to gather the significance of what he was saying. "Talking isn't any use now," he said. "Remember? It's all right—everything—just as we said. Go now."

Owen was the first to recover his self-possession. "I should say so!" he shouted. "Go upstairs this minute, and stop this nonsense!"

Esther was wonderful. She shone among them; she was like the first glare of a clear sunrise after a night of storm. She was like an accusation, and they shrank before her. When she turned to leave the room, Ned, the blacksmith's helper, moved aside in the doorway to let her pass, and they all followed her with their eyes.

When she had gone, Mark seemed to shake himself, and became very energetic.

"Now," he said, "we'll deal with you." He stepped up to the head of the table, facing the others as if he were holding a session of court. Bill Page remained seated, looking up into Mark's face. Harry and Owen, side by side, stood facing the kitchen door across the table. "I say," Mark went on, looking around him at the watching faces, "that there was whiskey aboard that schooner. You, Page—is your name Bill Page?"

"Yes, sir," said Bill.

"Now tell me the truth, so help you, God; was there whiskey aboard that schooner?"

"There was," said Bill.

"What do you mean, Bill?" Harry exclaimed.

"Ah, ha!" It was a positive scream of triumph. "Your own man gives evidence against you! What have you got to say to that? Hey?"

Bill leaned forward and put the palm of his hand flat out on the table. "Just a minute," he said. "There was whiskey there, but it isn't there any more; I chucked it overboard."

"What!" cried Mark.

"I chucked it overboard. What did you reckon I'd do with it? Open a hotel and start selling it? Let me give you a piece of advice, Mr. Valentine. Your man George, now—he isn't a good man to give a job like that to, planting that silly case of whiskey in the hold of a vessel. You want to know why? Why, because when he's drunk—and he's drunk at this very minute, down at your bar—he talks too much. He tells!"

Mark opened his eyes very wide; Owen leaned across the table to peer into his face.

"Who in hell's going to believe that

yarn?" said Mark, scornfully. "George'll say anything when he's drunk."

"Sure," said Bill. "That's what I'm telling you. He'll even tell who it was that told him to plant the whiskey. He tipped me off. I thought it was real good of him. He's an obliging fellow, George is, when he's drunk."

Then like a flash, Bill jumped to his feet, shouted, "Watch out, skipper!" and rushed through the kitchen door, slamming it behind him.

Ned ran around the end of the table, crying, "Get him! Get him!" Owen went the other way and joined Mark in a rush for the door at Ned's heels; the three hands clutching at the doorknob delayed them for a second, and in that second, they heard the outer door whirl shut with a tinkle of falling glass and a boom that shook the house. Ned vanished into the kitchen. "It's all right, Owen," Mark gasped, falling back. "Tim's on the beach. Let him go."

Harry paused in the parlor doorway. "You might just as well," he said, and was gone with the last word.

Mark and Owen stared at each other. Mark, though his lips were white and his knees shaking, was the first to speak. "We scared them out," he said.

"No, no!" Owen cried, catching up his walking stick from the table. "There's that man on the beach; there'll be a fight." He ran out through the kitchen, and Mark, following, caught up with him in the garden path.

Harry had doubled back around the house, crossed the head of the lane, and was flying down across the meadows towards the shore. Would Esther be there? Would she be there? That was all that mattered. He ran as he had never run before, but seemed, none the less, to go very slowly. Had he made it plain to her that he had expected her to wait for him at the boat? Had she been able to get away from the house before Bill ran for it? And Bill—would he understand that he must take the schooner's boat, and leave Esther's for them? If not, then he would find no boat there in the cove at all. He looked back to see if there was still a light in Esther's room, but the willows had shut out all sight of her window. Would she be there? He jumped from the top of the bank—while he was in the air, he saw that the boat was there—and his feet plunged in the soft sand. The beach was deserted.

"Esther!" he called. "Esther!"

There was a stir in the grasses under the overhanging bank, and Esther came out of her hiding place, and ran to him, holding out her arms.

"Good girl!" he cried.

He caught her in his arms and carried her to the boat, wading out in the water to set her in the stern.

Bill had run down the lane and across the meadow, with Ned close behind him, heading for the schooner's boat. When he came out into the open, he saw, over the horizon in the East, the yellow glow of the rising moon. "No more safe dark," he thought, as he ran. He plunged down through a gap in the bank, and came out onto the beach. Before him a man was standing—between him and the boat.

"Who's that!" the man called sharply.

Behind, Ned was shouting, "Stop him, Tim; stop him! Watch the boat!"

There was no time to swap knives. Bill kept on. Up the beach he went, along the shore of the cove, with the two at his heels. Had he but known it, he was leading his pursuers directly towards Harry and Esther!

Faintly then, ahead of him, he saw Esther's boat. He could make out the huddled figure in the stern of it, and see Harry wading back up to the beach. He slackened his pace ever so little, trying to think what he should do, and the runners behind shortened their distance. Then he saw Harry glance over his shoulder, whip out a knife, cut the painter, and push the boat out on the black water of the cove. Bill ran on again, breath-

ing more freely. At the head of the cove there was a creek, running in between the mainland and the sandspit; in spite of everything, he must cross the creek, and gain the end of the sandspit in time.

The footfalls behind him slackened, grew more distant, and stopped. The pursuers had seen the spot where the boat had been pushed off; the boat was already a mere shadow on the dark water, moving swiftly and silently out towards the anchored schooner. They stood for a moment, on the very edge of the sand, irresolute. Then there was a commotion behind them, and a spout of gravel and stones came rattling down from the steep bank; Owen and Mark were clambering down to the beach. The constables ran to them, and the four stood deliberating for a second. Then they set off again down the shore, after the schooner's boat, Ned and Tim in the lead, Mark and Owen following.

Meanwhile there was a rattle of blocks aboard the schooner; Harry was getting up the mainsail. He worked in frantic haste. Every moment the glow of the moon was brighter, and he could see the four running figures on the beach, and Bill, wading across the creek, away alone at the head of the cove. The great sail hung booming in the wind; the schooner seemed trembling in her eagerness to be off. Then a tremendous crash of iron stirred up the echoes of the little cove; Harry had let the chain run out, leaving the anchor there forever on the bottom. The jib climbed jerkily to the masthead, and the schooner began to turn and move ahead, pushing the little clapping ripples before her. She started out of the cove, dead before the wind.

Harry, gasping for breath, tottering like a sick man, stood at the wheel. "Esther!" he called. "Watch where we go. Is there room to pass close to the sand? Here comes Bill!"

"Yes," she answered. "Keep her as she goes. Plenty of room. . . ."

There was a flash astern, a shout, a report, and a bullet went singing overhead and through the canvas of the mainsail. It was a mark bigger than a barn door. The constables had put out in the boat, and were half way across the cove when they saw that the schooner was too decidedly under way for them to hope of overtaking her. Ned had flung an all-powerful phrase into the sky, after the shadowy vessel, and had sent the bullet to punctuate it.

Bill came flying along down the sandspit, taking great strides; he did not stop at the end, but leaped out into space. He sailed through the air, his knees drawn up; the light in the sky showed him in space, grotesque, a flying bundle. He struck the water with a splash, and his cap floated off beside him where he sank. He appeared again and began to swim strongly out to intercept the schooner. He was almost in her path; when she should run him down, he could climb aboard the bobstays. The bow hid him from view for a moment, and the schooner swept over the spot where he had been. Then he came scrambling up over the bow, out of the sea, and ran back along the deck, dripping.

"Good for you, Bill!" said Harry. "Just get the foresail on her, will you? Flying jib, too. She's bound home."

The rim of the big moon came up over the edge of the ocean, and touched with gleaming gold the mastheads of the Go in Peace. Harry swung her off and headed her down the path of light that lay across the sea. He put out his hand and drew Esther to him. "Bound home, she is," he said. "And she's in a hurry."

"But we don't need to hurry now," said Esther.

Far away, behind them, came the sound of another shot. Mark Valentine fired that one, the second shot of the battle; it was partly a signal of rage, partly of triumph, for it was not till morning, when the Go in Peace was far on her way, that he discovered that Esther had gone with her.

TENDERFOOT TARTS

By KENNETH PERKINS

THE chow-cart drivers, the bullwhackers and the pool players began to demand why it was Jude Marraday hid by the hour in his lodging-house room. He was supposed to have a job with a good agency, but as Cal Burton remarked, "If he's a fertilizer salesman then why don't he hotfoot around and sell fertilizers?" Jude could see most of the cow-town from his window. Cal, who kept the pool hall, opined that this was probably the secret of his retiring to his room.

It was not a pleasant room in itself: the odor of alfalfa, sweet enough at the right time, was imprisoned there until it had become stale. Marraday had tried vainly to open the window, but this was prevented by the warped sashing as well as by a broken cord. He contented himself with looking out of the fly-specked panes to the huge circle of the horizon. He could see where the Dry Wash cut through the plain like a wound on its breast, leading down to the first unpainted shacks of the town. The scene was without a touch of color except where occasionally a splash of red marked the blanket of a Cherokee squaw waddling down the street.

But directly below his window his eyes found refuge from the dun glare of the scene. An old adobe house stood half concealed by some palms and a large camphor tree. The lodger could distinguish little more than the red tiled roof and the mouse-colored walls checkered with a comfortable shadow. In the garden were more spice-trees, which whispered sleepily, a fountain with a slender tinkling jet of water, and somewhere a guitar thrumming.

Marraday leaned down upon the window sill and watched so that his mouth rested on the back of his huge hands. There was a brackish taste of alkali on his skin. That and the heat accentuated his thirst and misery and loneliness. He had a great desire to talk to someone—particularly to a young woman. He knew that a young woman lived in that house. He had no idea what she looked like, except that someone had said she was a brunette, almost Spanish looking, perhaps with Spanish blood, and that she lived with an old Mexican servant and a dueña who was her grandmother.

All that afternoon he had waited—it was the afternoon of the tenth day—and a little before sunset she appeared, a lithe Spanish beauty with a blood-red rebosa around her hair. He saw her smile. She even danced a guaracha for him to the accompaniment of the guitar which a servant was playing. It was obviously for his benefit, she made that clear. For a man like Marraday, with a yearning for a woman and a guitar and a fountain, a yearning which had been sharpened by many days of loneliness and the blazing sun, the invitation was unmistakable. He went down one flight of stairs in his rooming house, climbed out on the roof of the veranda, and swung himself by grasping the drain pipe, over to the patio wall.

"I wish you would let me see you do that dance again," he said as he straightened his coat over his big shoulders and seated himsef on the tiling.

"You better come down off that wall,"

the girl laughed. "You'll be attracting a crowd."

"I've been waiting for an invitation. Didn't think you'd want a stranger hopping into your laurel and manzanita."

"You aren't a stranger," the girl said, meeting his startled look with audacious black eyes. "You're the man they say has been pretending to sell fertilizer to the farmers hereabouts."

"Yes, I sell fertilizer," Marraday insisted, trying to mask his tone of surprise.

"They say you've been watching my garden from your window up there, and that you don't mix much with the cowmen. I reckon you're kind of lonely."

"Yes, I'm that too."

"Then come on down and have a little merienda. I'll get Mapima to fetch out some old Spanish jarez and we'll have some cakes made of bread and wine and eggs." She saw the hesitancy and surprise on Marraday's face and hurried on. "Perhaps you would prefer tortas?"

"No, whatever you have ready will taste delicious," the man rejoined chivalrously, "except tortas; I really don't like tortas as they are served hereabouts, cooked slowly on a flat rock till they're dry and tasteless."

"How do you like them?" she asked.

"Done quickly so that they're burned on the outside and raw in the middle so you can taste the peppers and wild onion!"

The girl laughed at such a tenderfoot perversion of taste. "Come on down anyway into my garden before the vacqueros see you."

Marraday scratched his chin dubiously. He realized that up till now he had made a failure of his purpose in coming to that town. He knew that his greatest mistake had been to make the townspeople suspicious of him. Here was an invitation which he was certain would spoil his last chance to accomplish his big purpose. A vivacious black-eyed girl for some reason or other was breaking down all conventions just to have a little afternoon's gossip with him. He felt morally certain as he jumped down onto the flagstone of that little garden that he was getting into a web spun for his own personal benefit.

She sat down upon the edge of the fountain and he took the chair she had placed for him in under the portales where the eye-like windows of the lodging house above could not look at him. He stared at the girl as the sun filtered down upon her through the camphor tree. Her olive skin seemed very delicate and soft at this close scrutiny—something he had not noticed from his window. But her eyes, lustrous as they were, made him wince with their prescient darkness. He felt himself fighting against her. He had a reason for coming into her garden, a very important one, but he could not keep it constantly in the forefront of his consciousness. He was distracted by the cucatoo fan, the finely wrought, blood-red rebosa.

"Rather a quaint old place here," he remarked, as he looked around, aware of the girl's appraisal of his own red face.

"This place existed before the town," she replied. "It was the center of all this cattle country. Most of our land, including most of the oil acres, was sold half a century ago."

"The cattle men still hold you as a sort of queen hereabouts though," Marraday objected.

"Perhaps," the girl responded, her eyes lighting at this fresh turn of their conversation. "They still cling to the old traditions. I am the only one left of the family, except my grandmother who lives here with me."

The Mexican servant appeared with a platter of cakes and a Hopi jug from which she poured some wine for Marraday. It had not been his custom to take any liquor while engaged in the work that had brought him west, but the fact that the town was dry, and the girl's in-

sistence, made him break a custom. As he drank he instinctively knew that he could have done nothing quite so foolhardy. But it was a magnificent wine, Jarez of a long-forgotten date. His long abstinence made him succumb rapidly to its glow. As he looked at the girl he felt the hot flush strike across his forehead and the delightful prickling of his mouth and finger tips. He realized then that his last chance to accompish his great purpose was irrevocably gone; he had fallen in love with Maria Andrade.

It was remarkable how the scene changed from that moment. The sunset heightened the color of the cholla cactus and pepperwood as he gazed through the pleasant purple mist of his own vision. The laughing eyes, and the smile on the thin dark lips of the girl seemed of an almost hypnotic beauty. He tried vainly to focus his mind on his lost purpose. With the foolish reiteration of a man who is succumbing to an enchanting drink in a hot climate he kept saying to himself, "I must remember why I am here. I can make love to the girl; that will help the great purpose. But I must not forget." He turned to her. He knew his forehead was wet, so he wiped it with his palm. The girl looked at him winsomely; she had remarked with a clever politeness on his fresh sunburn. His features, finer than any of the Westerners', must have been delicately white before that sun had reddened them.

"I haven't been able to talk confidentially with many of the people in town," he said. "I've been wondering if folks in these parts have ever heard of a fellow by the name of Jo Dabbins; they called him Smoo Dabbins back in Arizona."

He looked at the girl's face, particularly at her mouth, but could see no trace of a reaction there. He remembered wondering if she were holding her breath; that was one indication he knew he could interpret.

"I can't say I've heard of anyone of that name. He's come here to town has he? Or why is it you thought I might know him?"

"I was thinking he might have come to town," Marraday answered casually. He realized that he would not have broached this subject if it had not been for the wine giving him a strange confidence in talking about something he had until that moment guarded fearfully.

Both could hear the tinkling of the fountain and a loud buzzing of flies for a moment. Then the girl looked up at him. "Why is it you mentioned him? What about him?"

"No reason in particular. He's a friend of mine." He waited for her to repeat this, which he knew would have been the natural thing if she had known him. The girl said nothing. He sat stolidly wishing he had not broached the subject. He breathed heavily of the air. It was pungent with the pepperwood and the little yellow flowers of the cactus. All the aroma of the day seemed to have settled down at sunset into that garden. He inhaled it, feeling a calmness coming over him with the drowsy fragrance. His head spun slightly.

"I hope you will try some of this other jug," the girl said as Mapima poured out more wine. "It is called Val de Penas, a Spanish wine famous a century ago."

"Yes, that will help on such a hot day," the man rejoined. "I have been eager to have a drink."

"You heard back in Arizona I suppose that this"—she chose her words carefully—"this friend of yours had come down here into our part of the country?"

"Yes, that is true. I've been wanting to ask someone if there has not been a stranger around town; you are the first I have talked to about him. Perhaps you may not have heard the name. But then the cowmen would have told you probably of a stranger—"

He did not finish. His words became less important than the conversation that was taking place between their eyes.

"Any stranger around here we generally look upon as a road agent unless he has a pretty good job as an excuse," the girl said.

Marraday winced slightly.

"No I am not talking about you," she hurried on. "But men come into the wilds you know, men who are fugitives. We let them stay long enough to make good. It doesn't take long for a town like this to find out about a man."

"The man's past doesn't matter?" Marraday asked, raising his eyebrows as if to indicate his personal disinterestedness in the conversation.

"It depends of course on what the past has been. If it has been the murder of another man—"

"Yes, that is a good instance to consider," Marraday prodded insistently. "If a man has committed a murder—"

"Well, in that case it would depend upon his motive."

"You don't condemn a man—you yourself I mean—if he has committed a murder provided he has a motive? Well, suppose the motive were jealousy."

The girl was bewildered for a moment. The conversation had suddenly after smooth, rapid sailing, struck a curious snag.

"Why—let me think—jealousy! I have never considered that part of it. If a man killed another because he was jealous, say of his wife—"

"No, not his wife, certainly not his wife—that might justify him under certain conditions—but, say, of a sweetheart."

"I have not thought out that sort of case. What I have been trying to tell you all along is, that the law as it is written cannot cover all these cases. In these parts we get a bunch of shotgun deputies after a man, then hold a lynch court and string him for stealing a horse. That's the kind of law that I despise. I've always despised it since I was a little child. And to tell you the honest truth, I don't think the kind of law that goes—I mean the kind you find everywhere—is any better. A man can even kill in revenge and be fair."

"I can't say I understand that," Marraday remarked. "You've got a curious idea of law."

"I can't explain it all," the girl rejoined. "I wish I knew you better so that I could. I wonder if you would have time to see me again so we could get it all straight."

"Any time," Marraday answered eagerly.

"How about to-morrow at the same time? I have two pintos which we can saddle; we'll take a ride down into the canyon. We can ride as far as the Canyon Mesa and watch the sunset from there. It is the most beautiful thing about this country."

Marraday emptied his cup, and came over to her as she held her hand out to him. The palm tree and the cholla cactus seemed to circle slowly about him as she stood up; he knew the wine had been too strong. He knew also as he looked at the girl's oval face in that circle of purple light that he had made a disastrous move. He smiled foolishly, as he tried to think just why it was so disastrous. Nothing could have mattered he said to himself except the beauty of that face.

"And the next time you call we'll have the tortas done quickly," she said as he left her, "quickly and crisp—so that you can taste the wild onion!"

MARRADAY met the sheriff late the following morning in a little shop where Stew Pablo sold Shawnee curios and hot dogs. As far as Stew could see the meeting was entirely coincidental. Marraday came in with his suitcase and an overcoat, ordered tortas according to his own recipe, ate the concoction leisurely, and spent half an hour shooing flies. The sheriff, a lanky, leathery man, thumped in and sat at another table, drinking phosphate and chewing a dead

cigar. The two men began to talk, which Stew thought very natural, as did the Choctaw who blundered in and a buckaroo who exchanged greetings with the sheriff.

"What's the trouble now?" the sheriff asked out of the side of his huge mouth. "Giving the game up?"

"It looks as if I'm taking the train—eh?" Marraday laughed softly. "Well I'm not. My landlady kicked me out of the Continental Rooming House because I got to drinking yesterday."

"You're sure balling things up!" The long, lanky face stared out of the cobwebby window, watching a dray load of pecans pass. "You're in bad with the town as it is. You couldn't do nothing worse than getting drunk. It's way out of style here. And us Westerners like things done just so—in the style prevailin'." He lit his cigar stub, which he smoked from then on by holding it with a toothpick, as a boy holds the stem of an all-day sucker.

"I did it for a reason," Marraday explained when Stew Pablo ducked into the shed adjoining his shop for some more garlic. "It was a girl that wanted to get me started drinking. Maria Andrade and I have had a little afternoon tea together!"

The sheriff let out a huge cloud of smoke in a gasp. "Maria Andrade! You mean to say you've actually been talking to *her!*"

A fat cowman banged into the shop and Stew came out to wait on him. This interrupted the conversation. For a moment Marraday looked unconcernedly at the dust-filled wrinkles in the sheriff's neck.

"There's two damn-fool mistakes you've made, sonny," the latter remarked softly as the cowman began to guzzle his chile con carne. "You've been laying off on this fertilizer game so that most of the town knows it's only a stall. You can't fool them here that-a-way. And your second mistake, which to my mind has spilled the beans complete: you've got to talking with that there gal before it was time. You should 'a' stuck to your original plan and just watched her from the window. Her lover was bound to come one of these days and then you could ha' nabbed him without no danger to yourself or me or nobody. You see, sonny, you like to do things what ain't in the style prevailin', don't you—ay? Look at them tortas f'rinstance. You like to do things same as them tortas was cooked—quick and indigestable."

"Well, I figured this," Marraday went on, "I couldn't stay in town much longer without everyone catching on to why I'm here; you yourself admit that. Now, I figured that if Maria Andrade is the sweetheart of the guy I'm after I ought to cultivate her acquaintance before it's too late instead of watching any longer. If we get to know each other it seems to me that's the sure way of my getting some clue to the whereabouts of the guy I'm after."

"Does she know who you are?" the sheriff asked.

"Maybe she does. I got to drinking and babbling. But I will say this: I made a big hit with her."

The sheriff darted a look at him, hiding his face by holding the cigar stub up with a huge bristly hand. "You've made a hit with her—ay?" His mouth widened in a grin, showing red and brown teeth. "You're crazy. Made a hit with her hell! She's gunning for you that's what. She's going to stretch you the first chance she gets."

This was a sore blow to Marraday's pride. He raised his voice so that the sheriff got up and rattled his broken stool. "I tell you she's treated me swell. She's even asked me to go riding with her to-day. She can't be double-crossing me."

"All right, so long as you've got it all straight," the sheriff retorted with his uncomfortably suppressed wrath. "Here's

a girl in love with a guy she thinks innocent; she thinks Smoo Dabbins committed murder to get revenge on a guy for branding his brother. That's the tale he's told her. She don't know he killed him in a fit of jealousy over some woman. She believes his story and thinks he's in the right. She's in love with him too; you want to get that particular straight. She's plumb mad in love. Now you think she's fallen for you, do you? Well you wait until she gets you somewhere out in the desert alone! She'll bump you off so slick no one'll ever find your bones even. Just go with her if you want—rememberin' what I'm tellin' you. She's gunning for you. That's what I'm tellin' you."

"She's asked me to go for a ride this afternoon," Marraday said rather sheepishly.

"Ah ha!" The sheriff now had a splendid confirmation to his warning. "Wants yer to ride with her! Well, well, ain't that just fine? What was I saying about her taking you into the desert?"

"She wants me to ride to the Canyon Mesa."

The sheriff was nonplussed for a second. "Let me see. The Canyon Mesa this afternoon. Well, the beef herd's a-comin' to town. Will be ridin' through there about five."

"Wants me to see the sunset," Marraday went on sorrowfully.

"But the beef herd will be ridin' at five; will get to town about half past six. She can't be taking you to the Canyon Mesa. It wouldn't do her no good. She might as well pot you right here in the streets. I know what! She's going to switch you off somewheres. That's what."

"She won't switch me off."

"Don't go, that's all," the sheriff warned. "Don't even go back to her garden. A girl like that fights pretty hard for her lover. She's the kind of girl that won't stop at nothing. You'd better shag out of town right now before it's too late. That's what you-all better do. And get back to Arizona and tell them there you couldn't find this guy Smoo Dabbins. Tell 'em he had a girl working for him, a girl what would kill anyone who threatened to take her lover away from her. I warn you, it's certain—"

The sheriff did not finish. Two ranchers stepped up to the counter, and Stew took out some steaming tamales for them. The sheriff realized that already he had been seen too long with Marraday. He thumped over to the counter, laughed for a while with the cowmen, spat out his tobacco wad and walked out.

His unfinished phrase kept ringing in Marraday's ears as he stepped into the street. If he went with the girl it would mean—had the sheriff said "death"? But when weighed in the balances with his yearning to see Maria Andrade again, this word seemed curiously puffy and meaningless.

It must be said in support of Marraday's common sense that he waited until four that afternoon with the definite intention of avoiding his beloved "murderess." It was the suggestion of another long dusky gloaming, the scent of deerweed and chaparral suspended in the afternoon air, which lured him. Then there were certain mental as well as emotional reasons for his accepting Maria's invitation to ride into the canyon. The sheriff, he argued to himself, knew the exact locality of the proposed trip. The Canyon Mesa was not a very secluded spot; it could even be seen from the windows of certain shacks on the edge of the canyon. Then there was that point about the beef herd riding to town at the very time when they would be watching the sunset. He resolved to go and pretend that he had no idea it was a ruse.

The slender girl with her sombrero, cowboy shirt and riding skirt was a strange mixture of delicacy and ruggedness. Her grace in the saddle, Marraday persuaded himself was inborn. His own grace he knew was not. Despite the

holster with a loaded six-shooter, he felt very palpably Eastern in every jolt of his fine shoulders and huge elbows.

"I'm glad we're going for the ride," she laughed. "Somehow I thought perhaps you would forget the little engagement."

"Why did you think that?"

She glanced at him quickly and their eyes met. "Well," she looked down at the reins in her hand. "I thought perhaps the tortas—were not cooked exactly to your taste."

Marraday was silent as they rode through the town. But when they stopped at the blacksmith shop to mend the girl's Visalia saddle, he was sure that the dirty-eyed rag of a man who kept the place should know just exactly where they were going. Maria he also assured himself realized that the blacksmith had been told. If the whole town knew of their ride the girl, he argued, would probably think carefully about her tactics. It puzzled him somewhat when Maria Andrade herself told a rancher who was driving a cart-load of hemp down the street, that she was just taking a little ride to the Canyon Mesa with her friend, Jude Marraday. She even mentioned it casually to a group of middle-aged cowmen who were loitering in front of Cal Burton's pool hall. They glared sullenly at the young fellow from nowhere who had wormed himself into the affections of their goddess. Marraday noticed this in particular; their eyes were narrowed and glowering as he looked triumphantly at them.

By the time they trotted out on the County Road, he felt that practically everyone in town knew he was taking Maria Andrade for a ride into the Canyon.

A half hour of jog-trotting brought them out of the region of wired corrals. Marraday lost the sense of security he had felt in those very civilized fence posts with the little brown owls on them, turning their heads as he passed. He even liked to see the cottontails bouncing across the road. He did not relish the idea of riding in the waste unhaunted desert places.

Patches of tarweed and gramma grass led them down into a dun haze of sand and sage and giant cactus. The Mesa loomed in the distance like a huge island in a mirage of pale blue water. This and the drowsy balm of chaparral and sheep sorrel enhanced the man's feeling of emotional and disastrous abandon. It was the feeling, inherently soul-satisfying, of one who throws himself at the feet of a beautiful woman. The sailors of Ulysses throwing themselves into frothing seas because they loved the sirens could not have been more thrillingly bewitched.

At the foot of the Mesa, Marraday saw an old shake barn which buckaroos utilized as a cache for their canned tomatoes, coffee pots and Dutch ovens when they rode night herd. He stopped to look at it for certain very definite reasons. He liked the idea of being that close to a human habitation. This was one reason; another was that he did not want to ride very much further into the desert with his partner. If he could persuade her to stop here he felt that it would avoid the embarrassment of refusing to ride beyond the Mesa further on. He was convinced that the girl would entice him further. She might even extend the ride beyond the time of the beef herd's advent. If this should happen, his most reliable and comforting safeguard would be gone.

Unfortunately the girl upset his calculations by actually inviting him into the shake barn. "An interesting place," she said; "been here for fifty years. I wish you could see the inside of it. How about heating a little pot of coffee?"

Marraday, even though he immediately sensed a trap, realized that his whole game would be lost if he showed he was afraid at such a ridiculous juncture. His main intent in riding with the girl had

been to continue his friendship with her and attempt to gain her confidence. As yet, he felt practically certain, she had no definite idea that he was on a man-hunt trying to catch her lover-fugitive.

"We won't stay long," the girl coaxed, observing his hesitancy. "We can ride on later."

This was what persuaded him. He could play the game bravely now by going into the shack "to look around" and then stalling for time so that he could say it was too late to ride further. A cloud at the upper end of the canyon already marked where the herd was slowly moving towards them. He felt that there could not possibly be any danger of foul play under such very awkward circumstances. The town was on one side, every inhabitant of which knew he had gone riding with the girl. The beef herd was on the other approaching with a score of cowmen. He decided to affect absolute trust. They dismounted, tied their pintos to a Sycamore tree bole, and went to the shack.

Marraday unlocked the door with a key the girl handed him and then followed her in, his hand upon his hip. He stood on the threshold while his eyes dilated to the darkness. Several bats beat the musty air above him and zigzagged out into the open. He shrank palpably, which brought a titter from the girl .

"What's your hand on your hip for?" she laughed.

"They just startled me, that's all. Thought maybe they were owls about to peck at me."

"Sit down and I'll get you a can of Bull Durham. How about some beans with the coffee?"

"Anything. I'm not too hungry though," was his answer.

While she brought out the cans he peered into every corner. There was nothing very suspicious about the place. Except for a table, some sacks of maize meal, and bottles of codliver oil for the weaning of calves, the place was empty. Some olive-drab blankets hung in a closet; shelves were piled with cans and coffee pats. Although Marraday satisfied himself that no one was lurking about, he felt a terrific tension. Every sound made him jump—the crickets chirping, the cow-horses outside champing at the pebbly earth. He felt that he must make sure again about that closet. "I'll see what else is here for us to eat." He went over to it and poked at the musty blankets, then leaned down and looked under the shelf. The tension grew so oppressive that he almost wished the doom he felt sure was hanging over him would hurry up and fall. As he was rummaging about under the shelf the girl, almost without a sound, threw a lariat over his head. He straightened up quickly and wheeled around to find himself looking into the little black barrel of a pistol. Most of the frame, the trigger guard, the magazine, the hammer, were hidden by her little olive skinned hand. It was not a dangerous looking little hand—it was graceful as some girls' hands are no matter how grotesquely taut—even though holding seven deaths in the palm. She let him walk to the bench and as he sat down in front of her, he felt a sudden enormous relief.

When the girl remarked that she guessed she kind of surprised him, he rejoined, "Not in the slightest! I've been expecting this, and I'm glad the tension is over. It was much worse than having you tie me up."

"Well, I'm glad of that," the girl laughed. "Somehow I didn't want you to be a plain ornery fool. If you knew I was gunning for you and still persisted in queening me, then all I can say is you've got a lot of cheek—the kind of cheek I admire."

"Now that you've got me, what's next?" he asked. "Going to plug me with my own six-shooter?" He watched the girl turn the cylinder of the gun she had taken from him.

"That was the original idea," she remarked casually. "But I've been thinking ever since you came to see me yesterday; I've been trying to figure out a fairer way of getting you out of town. I decided I couldn't do the other, not after I had talked with you. Instead, I'm going to give you a taste of your own law. That'll be fair."

"That looks fair to me," Marraday remarked. "What's your proposition?"

"Just this: "You're after the man I love. You're going to get him and probably the result will be he'll be sent up for life or maybe hanged. You're after him, not caring whether he was a just man or not. All you know is that he got himself in a fix which men held against him, even though he may not be downright guilty of murder—except as it is written in law. Well I'm going to put you in a fix and let you see what it's like to have the world down on you when you're not in the wrong."

"Well what's the game?" Marraday asked. "You can't do anything here. Everyone knows we're here, and the cowmen'll be riding in with the beef herd in another half hour."

"That's the idea exactly. Everyone knows we're here. That's how I'm going to have you rustled out of town. We'll stage a little fake scrap you and I. We'll stage a little scene here that'll look as if you and I have been tearing each other's hair. Then when the cowmen come up, you'll have to explain why you got me alone in this shake barn and why we were fighting."

Marraday smiled as he realized that all the precautions he had taken to have the town know that he was riding to the Canyon Mesa with Maria Andrade had furthered her own game instead of his. He suddenly understood why she herself had insisted that everyone know of their ride, a fact that had been puzzling him all the afternoon. He decided to play another card.

"If you are putting me into this position just to get me ousted from town, how about your own reputation?"

"Every cowman in this part of the country knows me, has known me ever since I was a child. They'll all understand."

"But how about your own lover? Will he understand?" Marraday threw out what he knew was his strongest card. Smoo Dabbins had killed a man in a fit of jealousy; here was the character trait that Marraday felt was going to dominate the situation.

"If everyone on the countryside believed in me, you don't suppose that the one man who would lose faith would be my lover do you?"

"No, perhaps not," Marraday rejoined. "I regret making the remark. You yourself must know what sort of man he is."

"If he showed himself jealous I would despise him!" the girl asseverated. "That is one thing which would kill everything I feel for him. But he will have faith in me. It's the one great thing I love about him—it's his greatness of heart."

When Maria Andrade looked out of the half-opened warped door of the shack she saw a man riding up from the Dry Wash. By the sombrero, the blue bandana, and the pinto she knew that it was her lover.

Marraday was puzzled at the changed expression of the girl's face as she came to him. For a moment he thought that the cowmen had come, but as she ordered him into the closet he changed his mind. Something had happened which had completely upset her whole scheme of things. She told him to stay in the closet without making the slightest sound. It was for his own good, she clearly specified. A man was coming to the cabin who would plug him on sight.

A moment later Smoo Dabbins walked into the little shack. He stood for a moment staring at the girl, his big chest heaving, and Marraday, through the warped crack of the door, could see his red little eyes.

"Where's the guy?" Dabbins asked huskily.

"What have you been trailing us for, Smoo?" the girl parried.

"Where's the guy, I said. Don't stall."

"What guy?"

"Hell! I said, don't stall! They told me back at your house that you was with a guy yesterday afternoon, and right in your garden. And to-day they says you went riding with him. Come on now. I saw the two of you shag down into the valley and into this jacal."

"I knew you were coming this afternoon for some money." The girl turned her white face up to the thin unshaven face of her lover. "A man's been watching for you from a window in the Continental Rooming House. He's been watching for days and this afternoon he would have gotten you if I had not—"

"What the hell do I care about that!" Dabbins shouted, with no intention of trying to understand what the girl was telling him. "It's the guy what came here with you I'm after. He's in this shack now. And I'm glad I trailed you." For a moment he looked down at her, thrusting forward his handsome jaw. "It shows what you are. You're no good. You're bad."

"I had it all fixed, Smoo," the girl said, her voice changing to a cooler note. "The man who was watching you was Marraday, a detective. Can't you understand I was trying to get him away so as to save you?"

"I kinder think you're lying," Smoo rejoined, lowering his dark smudgy eyelids as he faced her. "I want to see him."

"I'm not lying, Smoo," the girl pleaded, angrily. "It was to save you."

"Then why is it you hid him?"

"I was afraid you'd pot him."

"Afraid? Why was you afraid if it weren't that you liked him?"

This caught the girl in a corner which she did not dream existed.

"All right, Smoo," she blurted out. "You've spoilt my game—the game I was playing for you. You've said you don't believe,so I'm going to let you see for yourself. But remember this: from now on I'm not helping you in your fight. I think I'll be giving the other man a chance. I'll let him fight you on even ground. That's the fair thing. We'll see who's the best man that way."

Jude Marraday could not clearly analyze the events of the following hour. He remembered a deepening dusk, the distant rumble of the Shorthorns and Herefords moving into the canyon, and the salty tang of the wind from the Dry Wash mingling somehow with the salty taste of blood in his mouth. There had been a great fight he knew that. His head still ached as he remembered how his jaw had seemed to crash into his brain. His knuckles were raw and bleeding; he remembered how he had smashed them into a bristly jaw, and yellow uneven teeth. He still thought he saw a picture of a dazed, puffy face bobbing about him, circling and sinking, then reappearing and waving its arms like a pronged cactus in a storm. He remembered how it had crumpled up before him and fallen shapeless on the floor; he remembered it reaching to the corner of the jacal where there was dust and tin cans and maize and a gun.

All the time he was trying to recall that distorted scenario of pain and triumph, certain words still rang persistently in his ear. "We'll see who's the best man," and "I'll let you two fight it out alone." He yearned to twist those words into a meaning dear to his own heart: "The best man is the one who will win me."

"That's what she must have meant," Marraday said to himself that night as he rode from the sheriff's office into the main street of the town. "Maybe she didn't think she meant it; maybe she even wouldn't admit saying it, but that's sure what she felt deep down in her heart—that the best man was the man who would win her."

He smiled triumphantly. "Lucky for me I landed that last wallop just as he pulled the trigger. I wouldn't have been the best man or any kind of man if I hadn't!" He looked around at the cowmen who were watching him from the doors of dry cafés and pool halls and from chow-carts. They grinned quizzically with yellow teeth. At last a baffling problem had been solved for them: this idle Easterner had come to town to get a pinkish sunburn and Smoo Dabbins and a Best Girl. He had caught Smoo Dabbins with his bare chapped hands and right at the time when Smoo's sweetheart had chosen to bump him off! It was an epic deed in their eyes but they refused to grant him more than a grin and a stare in the moonlight. He was a tenderfoot still, a tenderfoot who broke all their conventions, and to cap his long record of audacity he was actually riding to Maria Andrade's house that very moment!

They began to follow him, the chow-cart drivers, some of the sheriff's gun deputies, and a good handful of the cowmen who had just come in with the herd. They all expected another and much more sensational fight in the full blue glare of the moon. All they knew was that Maria Andrade had ridden home alone and that half an hour later this pink-faced detective had brought Smoo Dabbins in handcuffed and riding his own pinto. Maria was biding her time, they all said. She'd get even now, now that he was actually going to make love to her!

And Marraday had something of this same panic. "She didn't really say she would take the best man," he brooded to himself. "What she practically did was to wash her hands of both of us. Maybe if I go in to see her now she'll pot me—and yet maybe I've won her! I'll take a chance and find out which I get—the girl or—"

He dismounted in front of the adobe wall outside Maria's garden. For a moment he felt a qualm of fear. As he saw the cowmen in the distance—dark forms shuffling up big clouds of dust—he realized that it was a most inopportune time to woo, particularly to woo an enemy. But then he estimated that he had about two minutes to get into the garden before the crowd came. It would be a very uncomfortable situation to have a ring of them hooting at him while he paid his call. He knocked hurriedly but timidity at the little door in the wall.

He listened to the soft tread of footsteps on the garden flagstone, and in a moment the old Mexican servant opened the door.

"I want to see Maria Andrade."

"She is waiting for her lover to come at this hour," the woman said.

"I am the one she expected," Marraday replied. "Tell her that the man she expected is waiting at the door."

The old woman looked at him sharply, then frowned. "I cannot understand," she said. "I thought it was her lover she awaited. Those were her words—and yet—"

"Yet—what?" Marraday insisted.

"When her lover has come in the old days she has told me to prepare Jarez and enchiladas, but this night she has told me to fry tortas—"

"Tortas for her lover?" Marraday asked eagerly.

"Yes, but her lover never ate tortas. When I cooked them he would feed them to his burro; but this night she bade me to fry them, telling me just the way I should do it! She bids that they be burnt on the outside and raw inside so that the pepper and wild onions could be tasted—what an order!"

Marraday laughed loudly and then pushed himself in through the half-open door despite the old lady's tussling. Then he slammed it on the crowd of cowmen who were shambling up the street.

"Tell your mistress that her lover is here," Marraday announced, "that he is waiting for her at the fountain in the patio."

PLAYWIFE

By GEORGE M. A. CAIN

HE Whitewings had danced in behind the lee of the Atlantic Highlands pier three-quarters of an hour before the Mandalay dumped her throng of cheap excursionists for the long tramp from its end to the shore. The tide was low, making the shallow shelter of the lagoon impossible for hours. It had been a week now since the tender had broken loose in a squall. With easy disregard for the sign proclaiming the pier private property and forbidding its use as a landing, Harry Travis, artist, author, and yachtsman, had made the sloop's bow fast to one of the spiles and shinnied up it and gone ashore, leaving Mrs. Travis and the Travis baby to listen to the "Oh's" and "Ah's" of the admiring young folk who paused at the rail high above and gazed enviously down upon the vision of domesticity aboard the little vessel.

Out of the loud-voiced comments of the spectators, two were spoken in tones shrill and vigorous enough to register on the conscious notice of the woman in the boat. She was able to identify the authoress of each of these remarks, and to note that either's rather daring and entirely extravagant attire could have cost the owner not less than half of what Harry had long ago told her he had paid for the Whitewings four years before they were married.

The one's words were: "Say, Max, don't it make you sick to see the way some folks has got it?"

Said the other to her escort: "Yeah, that's what them kind can do f'r their baby. Summer before last, my kid brother died of whooping cough aboard a stinkin' fresh air boat."

Mary Travis laughed. It was the laugh of the wholly disillusioned—a bitter laugh. It was the laugh of the utterly disheartened—not much of a laugh at all.

Obviously the last speaker had not heard the feeble cry of the baby in the little hammock under the boom. Obviously she had not noticed, any more than Harry had thought out beforehand, that the black oil-smoke of the big steamboat rolled down with every other puff of wind, in choking gusts, under the awning stretched across the cockpit. Nor yet had that gorgeously over-dressed girl seen the face of the babe, to read there that t was sick—dangerously sick. You could not expect a strange woman of that type to notice what the baby's father had refused to see, even when it had been pointed out to him.

Never having seen a baby die of whooping-cough, Mary Travis dully, wretchedly reflected on how much worse it is for a baby to die of starvation.

Yes—starvation!

It was just six short weeks over one short year since the Whitewings had borne her away from this same bit of water between the long piers of the Sandy Hook boats and the excursion steamers. She had thought then that she would not care if it never brought her back.

Now—she had told Harry this morning, over in Gravesend Bay, that, if he once put her within jumping distance of shore at her home town, her step from the sloop's deck would be the last she would ever put on it. And he had answered never a word. But, with his boyish, handsome features black in what it

had once been fun to call the veritable pout it was, he had instantly begun to unfasten the awning and to clear the cockpit for sailing. They had come as fast as man could have brought the boat by that day's breeze.

"He called my bluff," she whispered for the hundredth time since their start, and her rather haggard eyes blinked as she stared down through the smoky atmosphere at the little waves over the boat's side. There was nothing to do now—nothing but to show him that she had meant what she said. If only she had not said it!

And yet—the baby was starving. Back yonder on the second hill—she could have seen it a thousand yards off the pier, if she had not been furtively studying Harry's profile, hoping that, in the last moment he would say something, something to make it possible to stay with him—back yonder on the hill was the old homestead and plenty of everything, everything but canned beans! Ugh! It was no wonder the milk of her breasts had gone thin and fair poisonous for the baby.

Plenty and welcome! Dull and hard were the lives of the old truck gardener and his wife up there, but not their hearts. They had not approved of Harry's whirlwind courtship and her marriage to the clever stranger three weeks after the day of their first meeting. They had wanted to know what he did beside sailing the Whitewings, what he owned other than the boat, what he was beyond the rollicking playboy. She had not liked their inquisition, because she had known, and would not tell them, all about him.

"Playboy of the Waves—" It had been on the third day of their acquaintance that she had dubbed him with the sentimental parody on the name of the Irish play. She had always been sentimental about Harry; she was yet. And he had liked the nickname. "Playmate," he had called her in turn, for a little over a fortnight. Then he had led her to the house of her own minister up on the Navesink hill, and made her his "Playwife."

Playboy—playwife—she wondered if any couple since the unfallen Adam and Eve had ever enjoyed so perfect a honeymoon. Northward they had cruised to the Bay of Fundy during the hot summer; southward they had gone and spent the winter in happy flitting from one Florida resort to another, and clear up the Gulf to New Orleans. Perpetual summer, perpetual holiday, perpetual picnic, perpetual fun!

Play children, they had dived into the dancing water together in the morning and swum races until their blood tingled. Housekeeping had been a joke. Harry had insisted that it was up to the crew to keep the boat clean, not the chief cook's job at all. Then he appointed himself second cook, and prepared such meals as made her regret the many, many they took ashore with his friends, who seemed to constitute about all the population of every port on the coast, who seemed to vie with each other in efforts to make their visits ashore a round of feasting, motoring, and dancing. They fished together, hunted together, sailed together on an ocean hardly so great as the fun they were having and their love for each other as they had it.

What if the tiny sloop was their only abiding place in the world? Who would not leave any home for a yachting cruise? And who could have devised, wished, or purchased a more perfect yacht for two than the Whitewings?

What if Harry's entire capital was the boat? What if his art could produce nothing better than the crude cartoon for which the Watersports Magazine paid him ten dollars a month? What if he was not, or likely to become, the author of anything but the articles on his favorite sport, accepted by the same entirely un-literary periodical, largely because they were accompanied by excellent photographs. What if his entire income

could hardly have fed either one of them ashore?

Could the table of a king boast costlier viands than lobsters, canvass-backs, terrapin, the choicest of roes, the tiniest of oysters, the daintiest of planked, baked, or boiled fish? The eternal round of little dinners ashore provided almost too much variety.

Nor did their own folding table lack for land foods. Prince of good fellows, loving everybody and loved by everybody in vacation time, and following everybody's vacations—Harry gave away more food than he ever ate, and was given more than he could ever use; he more than paid for all the motor rides, with his wizard knowledge of engines, at the disposal of all who might require or profit by it; he afforded, by the infusion of his own unflagging zest for fun, more fun than his entertainers bought him. Happiest in making himself the center of others' happiness, he made a rollicking world glad to keep him that it might have him to play with. It would have spoiled his own happiness, too, could he not have kept the one constant playmate of his playboy life the happiest of them all. In her bitterest moments now, she could not say he had not tried to do it.

But the depth of his failure was graven on cheeks pale under their deep tan, in eyes wide with anxiety and red with tears. It sounded in agonized whispers from lips that framed no more of a prayer than hopeless misery's cry—"Oh, God! Oh, God!"

To-day he had called her playwife for the last time. He had flung out the old pet name in irony hot with wrath for her total failure to live up to it. To-day she had called him playboy for the last time. "You're nothing but a playboy," she had fairly shrieked at him. "Would to heaven I had known that you never could or would be a man!"

Not much fun for either of them in that!

It had been in March, at Jacksonville, that the doctor had come down on her with the order: No more dancing, no more fast motoring over the rough, back-country roads, no more rough sailing, a rigid diet, avoidance of all strains. No, her alarmingly sudden sickness need not be regarded as serious, if she obeyed the order.

Would to God she had known how much more serious was the order than the worst the doctor had threatened as the alternative of its obedience! To save two lives, she had utterly spoiled them and a third. Better that she had died, better that the baby had never been born—than this!

No, it was not the foregone pleasures that she missed so poignantly as to feel that death were better than living without them. She was not sure that her first enthusiasm had not already waned, for the unvarying round of fun. Harry was her real loss. She had loved him with all the novel joy-life that had gone with him; she loved him still, now that there was no joy, now that he had proven his incapacity to provide for her any life at all. In bitter moments she might call him utterly worthless. He was just that, for meeting a single need of hers now. In other moments, yet bitterer, she knew he was worth everything else in life and life itself to her.

A blind, fatuous, foolish thing is a woman's love for her husband. After the love of God, it is the most precious thing in the world.

Fun is but the froth of life; a breath may blow it away. Harry Travis had kept his cup filled with foam. A week after the doctor had given his wife the directions for staying alive, there was little for him to drink but bitter lees.

He had sailed hard to get into Jacksonville to that particular doctor, one of his numerous medical friends. The Whitewings' arrival in the harbor had been the usual signal to draw to the yacht-club landing half a score of other friends, each with an invitation to dine,

motor, and play. Small indeed was the port in which the playboy's popularity was not good for a week of the best it had.

"My wife's sick," he had said, and half the invitations had changed to offers of pleasant rooms in bungalows. She had elected to stay in her berth on the boat.

In two days she was "all better." She convinced Harry there was no sense in his refusing to take in the club's weekly dance. She laughed at his notion that she would be lonesome, in an anchorage filled with friendly yachtsmen and equally friendly fishers. She would go to the dance herself, if he wished; but it would be no fun for her to play wallflower.

"Mercy!" exclaimed a plump dowager, losing step in the fox trot through which he was trying to pace her, "aren't you afraid to leave her away out there on a boat like that?"

At least ninety per cent. of the playboy's pleasure was always derived from the popular-hero position he maintained by his sailing, his ready helpfulness to boatmen, motorists, everybody, his infectious mirth. He was blest with intense sensitiveness to approbation, perhaps the nicest kind of vanity there is. His first feeling was vexation with the stout lady. She should have been grateful for the effort it cost him to dance with her. Instead, she had insinuated that he was not treating his wife as he ought!

He told Mary that much. He had not told her of his own reaction to the woman's hint. That came out a week after, when he refused to let her persuade him to take in another dance.

"Oh, I'm not going to have them all looking at me as if I must be a helluva sort of husband. They're right at that. It's no way to do—leave you out here, sick, alone, and—"

"Sleeping like a top," she supplemented with a laugh.

"Sure," he agreed, "but you've no wireless to tell me, if you weren't sleeping."

"I could break up the dance with a megaphone," she contested.

"Well—they don't know that," he had replied, and stayed aboard the sloop.

Mary had gone with him to the next dance. His partner for the third waltz, he found, chatting with his wife on the bench along the railing over the water.

"No, I'm going to chat with Mary," Mrs. Blount had declared. "She's been sitting here by herself all evening. It's really a shame for you to drag yourself out like this, to things you can't enjoy a bit." Mary knew that Harry felt as if the lady had inwardly accused him of doing the dragging.

The following day, they were giving a "yacht dinner." People who knew Harry counted his little dinners of sea-foods gastric events. He would have been the last to guess how many a feast ashore had been given him by some rich gourmand who would willingly have fed him a week in pay for the "something different" the yachtsman conjured out of things he had counted only in sport to catch.

"You poor darling," sympathetic little Mrs. Frazee had gushed across the table at Mary, "it positively takes my appetite to be sitting in front of you like this, eating these delicious things right under your eyes, while you can't have anything but that gluten bread and milk."

It seemed impossible that such infinitesimal false notes should destroy much of the music of gaiety which was Harry's real stock in trade, unthinkable that they might make to a man all the difference between living on the fat of the land and having nothing to live on at all. The fish dinners had to be given up; Harry's pride would not let him accept many invitations he could not return. He may have seen enough dinner checks to tell him what his entertainment cost his friends. He had never guessed what they saved him. He went broke promptly and thoroughly.

Being out of funds was neither unusual or serious to him. His life had

hardly needed more money than would keep a little emergency gasolene for calms, and the makings of cigarettes aboard his sloop. "I'll never starve while fish are in the sea," was one of his carefree maxims. So long as he had caught and prepared the fish, Mary had been quite satisfied—and so long as other people gladly gave dinners in return for it.

The doctor had prescribed diet of mostly milk and cereals. Harry could more easily have got her a diet of candy. Hardly a friend took a sailing trip without leaving a ribboned box for the captain's wife. None of them brought her bottles of milk. He had to get that from a dairyman, and pay a deposit for the bottle. As for himself, he made the discovery that he was not nearly the fish-eating animal he had always thought. The kind of fish diet on which he had thriven had been one modified about sixty per cent., with beefsteak dinners.

The breaking of his last ten-dollar bill usually set Harry to work. It now produced its familiar results, two thousand words, hurriedly written around the photographs he had taken most recently, mailed by special delivery to Stithers, the managing and sole editor of Watersports.

"Dandy cartoon coming," he wrote in a letter to accompany the manuscript. Stithers obligingly hurried back a check to cover the story and the expected picture. During his five days' wait, Harry had accomplished the cartoon. Incidentally, he had used up the broken ten dollars and another which, contrary to a pretty rigid rule of life, he had borrowed. And he could hardly miss the simple arithmetical deductions to show him that the balance of his check could not last ten days at the unaccountable rate money was running away from him. He wrote Stithers about a new series of extra articles. Stithers wanted them. A salaried, combined editor and advertisement solicitor would have done such articles for most of the semi-trade magazines of the Watersports type. But this was a side investment of a small publishing house. It paid salaries to no one but Stithers. The more material it could get at its low rates to contributors, the better; especially if it came from the pen of so popular and well known an amateur expert as Harry Travis.

Harry had always counted the middle section of the coast, from Beaufort to the mouth of the Chesapeake, the dull part of his cruises. It stood him in good stead now. The yachting crowd were natives, not vacationists bent entirely on a fast, good time. The practical ground for their love of Harry Travis was his ready expert service on their boats, always free for less than the asking. The practical expression of their gratitude took the form of strictly family dinners, quiet motor runs, theater tickets bestowed with the usual assurance that the giver had got them and could not use them. The womenfolk were wives and mothers; they understood and saw to it that Harry's presents of fish delicacies were returned in delicacies the prospective mother could eat. Even storekeepers, who were also boatmen at times, let Harry charge up foodstuffs and, with better knowledge than his of his own affairs, bade him let the little bills stand until "next time" he came.

"You'll be needing a bit of money now, Harry," was a common warning. Sometimes it was more roughly and bluntly and kindly put: "Forget it. Anyhow, it would have cost me ten times that bill to have that motor repaired." Once or twice this line was carried to the extent of a further gift. A black-faced boy would get down to the piers with a heavy box of canned stuff, when it would be too late to refuse before a departure timed by the tides.

The warnings fell short of accomplishing their purpose. A slow accumulation of money by saving was utterly beyond him. He was still short, still wondering constantly where the money was gone, still agitated as to where the next was

coming from, in time to catch the end of the last.

The crisis came with the birth of the baby. Harry had actually worked hard to produce two extra articles and a whole year's cartoons in advance. Mary was to have the best of hospital accommodation and medical aid at Johns Hopkins. There had been plenty of time, and he had asked Stithers to send the check to Norfolk.

Mary would never forget the week of waiting in the famous old port. Her day was approaching; something seemed to have gone wrong about the check from Stithers. Harry gave up most of his usually fun-filled time to hasty trips to the postoffice. He actually lost flesh in that week. In the middle of it, he wrote to Stithers to forward the money to Baltimore. But he waited two days more, lest the request should pass the check en route. He had broken his last two-dollar bill to buy the special delivery stamp for the letter. He went deeper into what was left of it to telegraph that he was sailing on the morrow.

A telegram came in response to his special delivery letter. Stithers had wired both Norfolk and Baltimore the message that Harry read through white lips.

"Boss suspended Watersports two weeks ago. Out of a job myself."

His manuscript and pictures, accompanied by stamps, had long since gone to destruction by way of the publisher's wastebasket. Stithers had not known where to reach the author with a warning. The letter had been forwarded to him.

The June night was hot and calm. Harry, laboring to start his engine with a battery he had expected to replace and could not, was called from the task to rush back to the yacht club, whiter lipped than ever. The two doctors he knew in Norfolk were both away from home. The steward of the club, having overheard his frantic telephoning, advised the general hospital of the town.

An unknown house-doctor assisted Mary's baby into the part of the world bounded by the four walls of a free maternity ward. One week there had the young mother cured of all desire for the fun of the old play-life. She wanted a home with at least the most essential comforts. She wanted her man to earn the money to maintain it. The tiny red morsel of humanity at her breast was worth everything else she had ever enjoyed and more.

She was disappointed that Harry did not propose the change in their mode of living and getting the living. When she had to suggest it herself, she was still more surprised at his answer.

"Oh, Lord! You'll get over that. I don't blame you—up against this. But you'll be out of here in a few days. You'll be all well again now.

"We'll make the best little sailor out of him the world ever saw! Couldn't be anything better for a baby than salt air. Why, Mary, my little playwife couldn't any more settle down to a little cottage on the hill or a flat next the roof than I could. And I'd rather be dead than tied down to any one place I ever saw.

"My game is the only one for me to play. Not much of an artist or author, either; but old Watersports isn't the only printed sheet in the world. I don't want to boast a bit; I'm no professor of science or languages; I don't figure that they'll ever be using my writings in the schools as models of diction and style. But they've got to hand it to me that I know the water game from A to Z. And that's what the fellows want who pay their quarters for the boat magazines. I'm trying out some new lines now; but, the minute you're aboard, we're going to head for little old New York. Then we'll get a line on what they're needing most in the way of information, and show them whether we're the little boy that can reel it off the portable rattletrap.

"You're down and out now—but this doc says you're all right. You won't

have to stick to mush and milk after you get out of here. We're going to head in for Atlantic City on the way. There's always some life there. We'll have a little christening aboard the sloop that'll be a christening, let me tell you. It'll wake the bunch up that we're alive again. And, you can take it from me, the boys that whisper beefsteak dinner are the ones who'll get the honor of entertaining the royal family of Henry Travis, Esquire. How about it, eh?"

She managed something of a smile. For some weeks she had been wondering just where a baby could come in on the life they had led. She had not found the answer. The baby had brought it along. He wouldn't come in at all; she didn't even want him to come in; just to hold him to her breast was all the joy-stuff in the world; to sit, with the baby in her arms and Harry by her side, in the most meager home imaginable, had become her notion of heaven.

Of course Harry was crazy enough over the baby to think everybody would want them worse than ever. She hoped he would not get too disgusted with folks who didn't. Anyhow, he had no doubts as to the future living—which had assumed the most poignant importance in her mind.

"I've always made all we needed, I guess," he said further. "We'll need more now, and I'll have to do more. It'll come hard to have to do a twelve-hour month instead of a six-hour one; but I'll just have to buck up and stand it. I know poor dubs who work twelve hours a day.

"If it comes to that, I'll show an admiring world I can do twelve a day, too. But don't you let a little back-fire like this Watersports bust-up scare you overboard. Your Uncle Henry is still at the helm."

Her smile widened. He kissed her. He had once remarked that any man could earn money to live on; it took a clever one to live without money. She thought he was at least as clever as the best of money-makers.

And they had come to New York. And Harry had found half the magazines on the verge of bankruptcy with the paper situation; none of them anxious to spend money for copy to stock them beyond a six months through which they might not survive. He had placed a "story" or two at bottom prices that had not squared his borrowings while waiting to get them. The only definite offer of any permanent promise had been from a semi-trade magazine which wanted him to write up the Great Lakes boat and engine building concerns, his apparently disinterested articles paid for at advertising rates by the concerns, his own pay to be a liberal commission.

His explanation of his refusal had been characteristic! "Good Lord! I'd die of lonesomeness. Why, I don't know two dozen people living or summering anywhere betwen Buffalo and—and Duluth."

They had quarreled about it. His indifference to their condition had got on her nerves. Her efforts to convince him that he must get some steady employment had got on his.

The quarrel of this last morning, the quarrel which must end everything between them, the quarrel in which she had told him that, once in her home town, she would leave his boat, his only home, forever—the quarrel he had finished by accepting the challenge—had begun over beans. Harry had never liked baked beans. She had liked them—once. It seemed to her that every grocery, from Georgetown north, had unloaded a stock of canned beans on Harry. During their northward journey, too hurried for much fishing, Harry had devoured the other canned stuff and left her all her favorite beans. At breakfast, with Harry about to go ashore and head for another interview with an editor, she had asked what she was to eat for lunch. And he had answered with the query:

"All the beans gone?"

Oh, yes, she had "gone off the handle." He ought to have known she did not

mean what she had said. She ought not to have said what she did. Every bitter word he had flung at her was seared into her memory as by fire; the bitter words she had spoken hurt her worse. Hers had brought his from him. She had given so much more than he deserved, that she deserved all he had returned.

"Why—Oh, God—why did I do it?" Her lips whispered the wails of her heart.

And yet, the baby was starving. She could eat no more beans. She had nothing else to eat. Harry had been too hard at work to stop for fishing—and she had accused him of being a loafer.

"Oh, God, why did I say that?"

No, she could not take it back. She could not ask Harry to take her back, to let her stay. The baby was starving. She could not stay while he worked only at what might help him play, instead of working at things that might bring them food to eat.

It was of no use to repent. The answer to her remorseful question was too bitterly obvious. The baby was starving. She doubted whether she could save the little life. The best of foods could not feed her with her heart broken. And, if the baby died—yes—Harry would take her back—they could live again as they had lived before—

"Oh, God! No—no—no—I didn't mean that!" She did not whisper, she sobbed the words. "Oh, God—forgive me! Oh, God—please—please—"

At last she had found something to pray for. She had not dared to pray for it before. It was too forlorn a hope; the answer to the prayer would seem too much a miracle.

Harry had tried a fiction story. It had seemed wonderful to her, when he read it to her. It had not seemed wonderful at all to three editors who had read it since. His boyish love of sympathy had brought from him the truth as to what they had said of the thing. But he had left the manuscript with a fourth editor. Their coming to Atlantic Highlands had been but advanced a few days by the morning quarrel. Harry had intended to come down for the international yacht races. Such an event in his line was not for him to miss. Though he had failed to get a commission to report the races, he might even find a place among the amateur officers of the Resolute. He had directed the fourth editor to mail his story or the check for it to the post-office here. It might have come through already. He must have made directly for the delivery window, his own hope higher than hers by all the optimism which obsessed him.

"Oh, God! Please make it a check!" the distracted wife prayed.

Well enough she knew what Harry would do with the money. The morning quarrel, the bitter purpose of their run down here—it would vanish from his mind as if it had never been. A box of candy, a taxi to run them out to her home on the hill, insistence that she leave the baby with her mother long enough to take in the town's one regular amusement, the movies at the Majestic, or a dance at the Casino, if there was one; these slight extravagances would express his suit for pardon. That would be Harry, that would be *her* Harry again. And they would stay here a while; and she would have the food she needed; and Harry would follow up his success; and the baby would get better; and then—

No, she wouldn't bother about things too far off. If God would but send that check, it would be enough. Get the baby well; give Harry back to her! If it meant to struggle on in the cramped cabin of the sloop, so satisfactorily roomy for two and so utterly packed with the tiniest of thirds—yes—a thousand times yes!—even a diet of baked beans again—

"Oh, God—please!"

And Harry came. He came now in a rowboat. With him was another man. She had never seen the other man.

But the rowboat was one of those kept for hire by a concessionaire of the park. Harry had not had money enough to hire

it when he left. Had God really heard the prayer?

His face looked cheerful. His movements possessed the old snap of good times. He rowed a lively stroke; he brought up briskly alongside the sloop. He leaped aboard.

"Steady, old man," he admonished his guest; "that guy ought to be hung for renting out such skiffs. I thought you were a regular bearcat with a canoe, though. Well, here we are.

"Mary—bet you can't guess who's here. My wife—the late king of all editors, the one and only known living specimen capable of appreciating fully the work of the greatest living authority on the most important of all subjects. Yes—this is Stithers!

"Ran plump into him, dodged out of the path of his car running out of a garage on First Avenue. And it's his garage; got his name right on the front window. A nice comment on the state of a world which sends its best editor to run a public garage, isn't it?

"He's never seen our little boat. I told him he just had to come right aboard it, business or no business, and let me show him what a regular boat should be. Say, has that infernal smoke been coming like this all the time?

"Get your coat off, Stithers. You can get busy unfastening the awning. We'll just run over and show Sir Tommy Lipton what a real yacht looks like. Incidentally, we'll take a squint at his pair of green birds."

He rattled on, shedding his coat, flinging it carelessly over the centerboard-trunk. Out of the pocket dropped a long, heavy envelope, the returned manuscript of his story.

Mary did not get much out of the swift sail to the Hook and back. She knew that Harry expected her to hide from their guest all that was wrong between them. She spoke, she smiled even, when they looked at her. But all she saw of the Shamrock III and IV was two green and yellow blurs with blurred sticks going farther up than she dared lift her brimming eyes, lest Stithers see them. Harry seemed lost to all thought of her, entirely taken up in pointing out the features of his vessel to a friend. Yes, that was Harry. Playboy—only playboy; he could play on happily, with his wife about to leave him because he would not support her and their child!

"Oh, God!" It was a smothered gasp of torture. Harry did not hear it.

It was still too early to get the sloop into the shallow lagoon, half an hour more of the incoming tide would be needed. The Mandalay had departed with her smoke. Harry swiftly rigged up the awning again, having lowered the sails and finished the last half of the return trip under the engine's power, during which he had spent the time in glowing comments on the machine and its work. He left her where he had left her before.

Slowly the tide filled up, began its slow ebb. Slowly the sun settled into the haze above the horizon to the west.

It occurred to Mary that she had made no move to pack her belongings; she was wearing the bathing suit which was her most usual sailing costume. She could not go home that way. But she could not yet summon strength for the task of packing or dressing.

The baby's cry became insistent. She picked him up, put him to her breast. Twenty minutes later she put him down. Ten minutes after that the cry was sharp and hard. She warmed some water over the oil stove, got a few drops of it onto a spoon, then down the baby's throat. But it seemed to her the cry grew weaker only from exhaustion. At last he slept. His hands moved in sudden twitches.

And then Mary packed and dressed, and sat down—and waited on.

Once, as she waited, she thought she was going to scream. She didn't.

Once she thought she would take the baby and climb up the spile as Harry had first done. She knew she couldn't.

Once she thought she would take the baby and jump into the water. She gave up the idea. She was not sure whether it was from old religious scruples or from fear that she would almost automatically swim ashore and drown only the baby in the long drag through the cold water.

When the little ship's bell clock in the cabin tinkled five times—it was really half past seven by the daylight-saving time ashore; but Harry kept his time, navigator fashion, by the sun—she wished she could eat. She tried to be regular with her meals, for the sake of the baby's health dependent on her digestion. But there were only beans for her to eat.

Harry knew there were only beans. She wondered if he were eating dinner—with Stithers.

She quit wondering. She could not stand it.

Six bells sounded—seven. She had heard Harry say the tide would be full at half past five. If he had been talking sun time, the tide had been running out an hour; if he had been speaking in the terms to which Stithers was accustomed, it was already too late to make the lagoon.

Did he intend to leave her here all night? Had his anger set about the infliction of punishments?

She stopped thinking about that. It seemed as if the slow sinking of her heart would go right on, and she would die. She stopped wondering what Harry would do with the baby. She sought only to close the eyes of her mind to all thought. The dull ache of misery was bad enough; every thought was a poignant stab of pain.

And then he came again. This time it was in the Seabright skiff of a native lobsterman. He chatted gaily with the man.

"Mightily obliged," he said easily, as he stepped from the skiff to the sloop's deck, kicking the light motor boat's bow clear with his foot, so that its owner need but shove in his clutch and keep on his way.

He did not speak to her. In a moment they were running for the narrow canal into the lagoon. He swallowed hard, cleared his throat once or twice, but that was all. And she noted that the wheel in his hand shook a little. Nothing else. He got a couple of fenders over the side as they came up to the concrete wall. A big touring car stood empty beside the wall at the spot.

He made fast the rings, fore and aft, with the lines crossed. With a leap, he was on the wall. She reached up a couple of suitcases.

"Is the trunk packed?" he asked—the first words he had spoken to her. "We'll leave it until to-morrow, if you can," he added. "No, you let me help you. I'll get the baby after I lock up. Here, get into the car. Stithers let me take it. Good sc-c—"

He had choked on the words. He jumped back aboard the sloop. For five minutes he hurried things into their places; he pulled the cabin hatch shut and closed the little doors. He unfastened the baby's hammock, folded it behind the tiny child.

It was growing dusk. She could barely see under the awning. Harry slowly wheeled around, as if to make sure that he had not overlooked some detail of making things shipshape.

Then he did something she had never seen him do before. He had always declared he was afraid to touch the baby, lest he crush it. It had seemed to her that he did not care to. There was a sudden contraction of his arms about his wee burden. His head went down. It touched the too thin face of his son. Was the sound a sob rather than a kiss? It might have been. Playboys are sentimental.

He leaped up the wall again, hurried the bundled baby into her arms, clambered into the front seat, pushed the starter. She was glad it was not a runabout. She could not have borne that he should see her shaking shoulders or hear her sobs. Of the old, familiar streets,

she saw nothing. She lost track of the turns. As the car slid to a standstill at last, she pulled herself together, batted the drops from her eyes.

Harry was holding the door open. But she looked past him. It was not the old farmhouse; it was not the opposite side of the street from the farmhouse. The low building—why, it was a new bungalow. She knew the place now; the Davidsons had talked of starting a colony on their ten-acre field just above her father's farm.

"Where are we?" She put the question she had already answered in her mind, instead of the one she could not answer.

"Home," he said blithely. "I hope—you'll—you'll like it." His blitheness had lasted him through three words. The rest came stumbling between queer, choking sounds and audible swallowings.

"It—it's all I could get in the neighborhood. Stithers — he—he bought — the Whitewings. I had to buy this to get it; it was already rented, subject, though, to sale. If you don't like it, I guess we can sell it next—spring. We'll probably have enough—to put with it for something else. Stithers is going to pay me sixty-five a week—in the garage. He says I know more about motors than any two men he can get. He's thinking about starting a boatworks next year and having me manage it.

"What's the matter, Mary—isn't it good enough? What—"

"Oh, Harry—it's—it's heaven!" she sobbed.

"Well, come on in," he invited. "Let me carry the baby. Yes, I want to. I—I guess I've got to have something to play with."

HIGH-GRADE

By J. ALLAN DUNN

Entered in the BLACK CAT *Novelette Contest*

A MAN on a rangy roan came out of a clump of pines and reined in on the edge of the steep slope, looking down into the little valley with eyes puckered at the corners from much gazing in the sun, eyes that were as gray as the rocks, cropping out here and there on the rim of the valley and on the sides, where they were not covered with clumps of quaking asp, scrub oak and choke cherry. There was a hard glint to those eyes, like the mica that showed in the granite, and they took in every detail of the landscape as horse and man stood motionless in the shadow of the trees.

The horse, for all its quietness, showed no signs of having come a lengthy journey. The man sat leaning forward in the saddle, both hands folded on the horn, in easy pose. He wore a blue flannel shirt, open at the lean but not scrawny neck, that was tanned, with his face and hands, dark brown. He wore leather chaparajos above his brown jeans, tucked into the high-heeled boots that proclaimed him cowman and professional rider. He was deep of chest and wide of shoulder, lean of flank and long of leg, a fitting mate for his mount. Neither carried an ounce of superfluous flesh; both were in prime condition. The horse was roman-nosed; so was its master. From the man's belt there swung two holstered Colts. His chin projected forcibly, with a crease between it and the firmly closed lips of a mouth that, though stern, quirked up at the corners, a mouth that could smile on occasion, a mouth, nevertheless, that looked as if it did not utter many unnecessary words. His hat, shoved back to show close-cropped black hair, was a many seasoned Stetson.

The valley was almost a perfect oval, about three miles in length and half that distance in width. A road ran diagonally across its lower end, cutting off a third of the territory, that had not been cleared but showed dark with first growth pine. A stream looped several times across the road, disappearing in the trees. Its source was the same cut in the valley walls through which the road entered. One of its loops enclosed some fenced-off patches of alfalfa, vividly green against the browner pasture grass of the larger portion of the holding. At the head of the creek's bend stood a ranch-house with its outbuildings. Fence lines ran here and there, but there was no stock visible, with the exception of half a dozen horses in a corral, clustered under the shade of a cottonwood tree. Other trees helped to shade the land immediately about the house and a little garden. The sun was four hours high, the sky cloudless and in the rare air of the five thousand foot altitude, the topographic details were plainly visible, enhanced by light and shade. The shadow of a soaring buzzard drifted over the slope just below the rider, but the man did not look up. It was very still, except for the whirring chorus of the *cicadas*. Back of what appeared to be the main barn, a tall rock jutted up for nearly a hundred feet.

The man's eyes seemed like the lenses of cameras, registering every square yard of the view in photographic detail on his mental film. His lower lids were straight and the upper ones formed wide-angled

V's, through which the gray eyes gleamed unwinking.

Seemingly satisfied, he straightened in his saddle and his knees pressed the roan, which commenced to descend the slope with the sure-footedness of the mountain-bred animal, sliding here and there down steep declivities on its haunches. Man and mount seemed one. Reaching the comparative level, the roan broke into a rocking-horse lope that was deceptive as to the real speed with which it covered the ground. Once in a while the man opened up primitive gates in the wire and closed them again without effort, the horse taking position to make the work easiest, as if thoroughly accustomed to such expeditions.

The horses in the corral whinnied as the pair went by and the man looked them over rapidly but searchingly. He could have named the points and markings of each, with their brands, and a good guess at their good and bad qualities, before he had passed them and halted in front of the house veranda.

There was a slightly puzzled expression on his face that cleared as he called out the usual salutation in a deep but clear voice:

"Hello, the house!"

He repeated it and, at the lack of any answer from within, the puzzled look came back. The silence appeared to give him cause for wonderment, for a momentary indecision. Then he swung from the saddle and walked up on the veranda, leaving the roan anchored to trailing reins. He had to bend his head as he entered the door, which had been built to accommodate people of only average height. The house was well built of logs with a sod roof, without especial regard to proportion or beauty, but the interior was furnished in a manner that belied its outer indications. The door opened directly into a large room that was apparently used for both living and dining room. There was a big fireplace built of stone with well filled bookcases on either side and deep-seated Morris chairs facing the hearth. The wide mantel had specimens of Indian pottery and basket work. Above it rifles were laid on antlers. Navajo rugs were on the walls and on the floor. There were one or two pictures. The table was of oak, as were the chairs about it, four of them drawn up for a meal. And the meal itself, laid on a white cloth with a display of good china and silverware, seemed to have been just served. From one platter ham and eggs had been dished out and the yolks were unbroken. Biscuits had not been split, all four of the cups were filled with coffee in which cream had been poured but which had not been tasted. The knives showed no signs of use. Two napkins lay on the table, one on the floor and another on a chair. The chairs were set back a little, as if for rising.

Somewhere, in another room, a clock ticked. Two doors opened to one side off the main room, another at the back. The man, walking cat-footed, though without apparent effort at secrecy, surveyed the table, opened the doors, a vertical line deepening between his brows. Two of the rooms were used for sleeping. The beds were of enameled iron, the linen, blankets and counterpanes of good material. They were unmade. Two pairs of pajamas were in each room and, behind curtains of brown denim, articles of men's clothing. The man handled these swiftly without disturbing them from their hooks. He seemed to be taking inventory. The fourth room was a kitchen. There was a built-in cupboard and a bunk, a table, two chairs and a stove. He lifted a lid and examined the glowing fire. A kettle was hissing. A frying pan held some sliced potatoes, a little overbrowned.

He went back to the main room and picked up a pipe from the mantel board. Its bowl was slightly warm and it was carved into the shape of a cup held by four claws, one of which had been broken off. The briar was polished and stained

by long use, the edges of the bowl charred. There was tobacco in a glass humidor and he smelled it, his eyes widening as he recognized its quality.

He took out a package of granulated tobacco from the pocket of his shirt and swiftly rolled a cigarette, inhaling it gravely as he smoked it to the last inch, before he threw the butt into the fireplace.

"Took me fifteen minutes to ride down," he said aloud. "I was five, giving the place the once over. They must have lit out just before I came out of the pines. But why? What for?—with a fine breakfast all ready. Cook gone, too. That was a Chink's blouse atop that kitchen bunk. Looks like something had scared 'em worse 'n a ha'f grown cottontail with a coyote sayin' good mornin'. They cud hardly have seen me come out of the pines. No winders that way. Nothin' about *me* to send 'em off with empty stomachs. Main point is, where did they go? Too much of a hurry to saddle up. If they'd kep' to the trees I might not have seen 'em," he added reflectively, moving towards the door.

Then he stiffened and his hands sought his gun butts as he stooped and peered out of a window towards the road. Five men, riding fast in a cloud of dust, were coming towards the house. The last two, abreast, carried rifles across their saddles; on the chest of the leader, riding a fleabitten gray at a gallop, a star gleamed.

"Well," said the man, "here's more visitors. Now we may learn something." He rolled another cigarette and made himself comfortable in one of the Morris chairs. There was no hail from the outside as the horsemen checked their horses and dismounted. The man with the star on his shirt came swiftly into the room, a gun covering the other who lolled in the chair. Two of his companions followed closely. The two with rifles remained outside.

"Put up your hands. Quick!" said the leader. The man in the chair obeyed. There was something like a twinkle in his gray eyes as he stretched his arms upwards, resting them along the back cushions. His voice drawled as he answered:

"Anything to accommodate a man who's got the drop on me. What's the idea?"

"Get his guns, boys." The two men whisked the long Colts from the holsters.

"Make yourselves quite at home, gents," said the captive. "I ain't hungry or I'd ask to join you. Grub's a mite cold, but it's all ready to serve. Reg'lar free cafeteria. Hot coffee out there on the kitchen stove."

The leader scowled at him.

"Your tongue's hinged too free," he said. "I'll do the talking."

"I'm agreeable. Ears wide open. You ain't answered my question yet. What's the idea?" His voice hardened a little. "Can I put down my hands? You've got my battery. I'm harmless as a knittin' spinster." He folded his hands in his lap as the other nodded.

"What's your name?" demanded the man with the sheriff's star. "No use lyin', 'cause I know all four of 'em, five includin' the Chink. Which one are you?"

"Rightly speakin', my name ain't none of your business, but, to show I'm willin' to sit in sociable, it's Jud Steele. Full brand Judson J. Second J bein' for Jeffries. That's my roan outside an' I've rode over from the Twin Knob ranch this mornin' to say howdy to my nearest neighbors, never havin' made their acquaintance. They warn't home. Seemed to have lost their appetite, sudden. Mebbe you know a reason. I don't."

"That's a lie! There's no one livin' at Twin Knob ranch. It belongs to Bill Sangster. He's over to Flivver Creek, to the mines. Been there four months."

Jud Steele's eyes glinted.

"Sheriff," he said. "I take it you aim to call yourself sheriff?"

"You see my star."

"I've bin admirin' it. More'n I do its owner. It ain't polite to call a man a liar at any time, an' when you've got that man covered, it may be safe, but it's a dirty yeller trick. Before you an' me say the final fare-you-well to each other I figger you'll announce it was a hasty remark an' one you're willin' to take back. I'm tellin' you, for the third time, you ain't answered my question. What's the idea of stickin' me up?"

The sheriff sneered.

"I suppose you don't know. I'm goin' to ask all the questions, J. J. Steele. You can't stall any longer. Which way'd your pardners go?"

"Search me, Sheriff." Steele straightened up, his long body growing tense. "I'm gettin' a bit tired of this. I—"

"Oh!" The two followers turned at the sound of the new voice. The sheriff flung a glance over his shoulder but brought it back swiftly to Steele.

"You sit still. Come in, marm."

"A girl entered," young and slim. She was not a mountain girl, but a product of the cities, dressed in a gray corduroy riding suit, her breeches ending in tan boots, spurred with tiny silver rowels. She was blonde and her face, flushed with surprise and excitement, was untanned.

"Was you lookin' for anyone, Miss?" the sheriff went on as she advanced into the room. Better shut that door, Jim," he added. "Maybe this gent in the chair was expectin' you?"

"I don't know him," said the girl slowly. "Why have you shut that door? I am looking for my brother. I—"

"I see, Miss. I reckon he's just stepped out. You was meanin' Frank Deming?"

"That is his name. I have come from Denver to see him."

Steele liked the way she answered, the spirit in her voice. She had come well into the room and was standing near the mantel board. Suddenly her eyes dilated, the smooth contours of her face seemed pinched and the color ebbed from her lips. Steele saw that she was looking with something akin to dismay at the pipe with the clawed bowl. He saw her lips tighten and their color return. There was a flash in her eyes as she turned to answer the sheriff's next query.

"Was he expecting you, Miss? Your brother, I mean. Sent for you, maybe?"

"That," she said, "is my business."

"Ah! An' mebbe it's mine. I'm goin' to look for your brother an' some friends of his. You'd better stick around till I come back."

"I intend to, until *he* comes back," she answered composedly, and turned to the bookshelves, pulling out a volume here and there and glancing carelessly through it. Steele saw that her hands trembled slightly though she strove to conceal her nervousness.

The sheriff looked at her with the suspicion of a snarl.

"My name is Hines," he said. "Sheriff Hines. If you should happen to see your brother, Miss, before I do, you give him a bit of advice from me. You tell him to come clean. The more he talks the less he'll get."

The girl's chin went up and she turned her back on Hines.

"Reckon that advice 'ud work fine for you, Sheriff," drawled Steele. "If you take it backwards." Hines wheeled and advanced threateningly.

"Another word out of you," he stormed, "and I'll put a gag on you."

"Which won't prevent my thinkin'. Hines glared at him but turned away with a swagger.

"Better make up your mind to come through, too, J. J., as you call yourself," he said. "I won't promise to make it easier for you, but I'll sure make it harder if you don't. Jim, you an' Pete stay here an' chaperon this couple. I'm goin' with Red and Shorty to pick up the trail. We're likely to get back a bit late, because we aim to get 'em, one way or another."

Steele saw the girl's shoulders quiver for a second. He shifted in his chair and the man called Jim immediately raised his gun.

"You ought to be comfortable in that chair," he warned. "Jest set thar—an' set damned still."

"Your mouth needs washin'," retorted Steele.

Jim shoved the muzzle of his gun at Steele's face, but the latter's unflinching, contemptuous gaze made him pause and lower the weapon. Hines went out of the door, closing it behind him. Murmurs of his talk to the two men outside reached the room faintly. In a few minutes there was a scuffle of horses' hoofs and Steele looked out of the front window, thinking the sound loud for three mounts. He saw the six horses that had been in the corral sweep by and then his own horse and a pinto that he guessed had been ridden by the girl, the pair led by Hines and one man, the other man herding the loose ponies down the fenced-in road. Steele said nothing. The lines that stretched from nose to mouth corner deepened and his lips settled in a grim line. The girl, now in a chair, seemingly absorbed in a book, did not look up.

II

THE morning wore on slowly. Steele occasionally shifted gently in his chair, more freely as the attention of his guards wavered, though they kept their weapons ready and were alert enough. His own Colts had been kept by the sheriff. Jim smoked, and Steele, after a marked request as to whether it inconvenienced the girl, rolled an occasional cigarette, with the permission of the two deputies. They evidently sized him up as a dangerous customer.

Noon came and passed without sign of Hines. A clock in the kitchen struck one—then two. The girl read on, though Steele was fairly certain that she could not have told the plot of the story she was perusing. Once or twice he caught her looking at him doubtfully, shifting her glance immediately she thought he noticed it. She seemed, he fancied, to be appraising him.

"I wouldn't wonder," he told himself, "whether she don't think I am a pal of the man who owns that pipe. If so, I'm in wrong."

"Jim," he said, at last. "No sense in goin' hungry, is they, with a house full of grub? I reckon there's more ham and eggs an' coffee, anyway."

"By gum!" said Pete, hitherto so silent as to suggest he might be a mute, "he's right. I cu'd eat the hind laig of'n a mule."

Jim looked dubious, but he also looked hungry. He licked his lips.

"I kin cook," said Pete.

"I'll get a meal for you," said the girl. Steele looked up with surprise at the offer. He read the answer in the look in her eyes. She was snatching desperately at a chance to get away. But her voice had been a little too eager.

"Not you," growled Jim. "There's knives in that kitchen, I reckon. An' a back door."

"Then, I can clear the table off in here. I'm hungry, too."

Grit, clean through, Steele told himself.

"Don't suppose I'll even be 'lowed to wash the dishes," he said.

"You set still," said Jim. "If we give you enny grub it'll be a sandwich. An' it'll be brung to you. Go out an' prospect around, Pete. I'll keep my eyes on 'em."

He sat with his attention divided between the girl and Steele. As she moved round the table after removing the used plates, waiting for Pete to give her a fresh supply, she straightened out the cutlery. She came round one corner with her back to Jim. Steele had been waiting for her to get in line. His lips moved, forming distinct syllables:

"GIVE ME THE PEPPER."

Her eyes stared into his. He did not

doubt their comprehension. He had already measured her and now he saw she was once more measuring him, looking deep into his gray eyes, searching for truth, wondering whether she could trust him. She barely slowed up, moving on, touching a napkin here, a knife there. Steele made no attempt to follow her movements. If she was going to ally herself with him he knew he could trust her wits. Pete came out of the kitchen with an armful of plates, one hand bristling with knives and forks. The smell of ham and eggs preceded him.

"Ready in a jiffy," he said. "How d'ye like your aigs, Miss? Straight up?"

"I think so. How about your's, Mr.—"

"Steele," Jud answered. She had one hand clenched, he noticed, and she gave him a meaning glance. He let his own hand slip leisurely over the arm of the Morris chair.

"His'll be a ham-and sandwich," said Pete. "The plates is warm, Miss. I'll put the chuck on a big dish." He set down his burden and went out. The girl laid three plates and walked around the table, arranging the fresh knives and forks. None of those originally laid had been used, but she made no comment. Passing Steele, she dropped a fork. Jim looked up sharply for a moment. She stooped to retrieve the fork and, as she straightened, her hand touched Steele's and he palmed the glass pepper castor.

Slowly, though he knew the moments were precious, he folded his hands in his lap and unscrewed the top, letting the contents fall into his left palm. Now the issue was in the laps of the gods. If Pete came in before he could carry out his plan it would be half defeated, if not useless. The girl came to his rescue.

"Will you sit here, Mr. Jim," she said, "opposite me?" She smiled at the deputy and he smirked back.

"Ruther not have my back to Steele," he said. "Better you take this chair." He laid his left hand on the back of it, the gun in his right, next to Steele.

Steele rose from his lounging position, effortless, swift as uncoiled springs. He dashed the pepper full in the face of the luckless Jim, dropping his left hand to the deputy's right wrist while his own right fist crashed against the angle of Jim's jaw. Jim's knees gave way; his nerves and muscles failed to coordinate, the connection short-circuited by the short-armed jolt; and Steele caught his body and swung it into the chair he had vacated. With the deputy's gun in his hand he leaped towards the kitchen door and stood to one side of it. He was just in time. Pete came in, with a kick of his foot to the half-latched door, a platter of steaming food in his hands. The look on his face was ludicrous as he faced the barrel of the pistol.

"If you drop it," said Steele, "I'll kill you. Take it from him, Miss Deming, and Pete, you elevate."

He took away the second gun and backed the still astounded Pete into the high fireplace where he was forced to crouch in the opening while Steele gave brief attention to the unconscious figure of Jim, sprawled in the chair.

"Miss Deming, there's a barn out back. Will you slip out there and see if you can find a rope or two for our friends here. If you run across some baling wire—know what that is?—that'll be better. Take a look to see if Hines is in sight. If not, we'll have our meal before we light out." She left, with a backward glance in which he read amusement, admiration, but not a bit of nervousness. Pete squatted amid the ashes like a giant toad, his eyes rolling fearfully. Steele smiled at him and took the ham and egg sandwich from the platter.

"Chew on this," he said. "It'll keep you from worryin'."

Jim groaned and showed signs of coming to life. Steele faced the pair of them, a gun in each hand. When Jim's eyes lost their gaze and began to glare, Steele talked to him.

He had achieved a few surly answers

when the girl came running in, and there was a grim smile of satisfaction on his face.

"You'd make a bum witness," he said to Jim. "You don't git your facts assembled. You talk like a bobtail flush."

She had brought a bale of soft wire and displayed a pair of pliers.

"There's no one in sight," she said.

"Good. Can you handle a gun, Miss Deming?"

"Yes."

"Not afraid to shoot it?"

"Not if it's necessary."

"It is. Plug Pete there if he tries to hop while I attend to Jim."

She took the revolver and balanced it in a way that showed she had held and fired a pistol. Her mouth and chin were very determined and the look she settled upon the cramping Pete was in accord. There was small doubt but that she would pull the trigger, around which she crooked one slender finger.

"That's my gun," said Pete. "It shoots easy, Miss. Look out for it."

"I'm looking out for you," she answered, and her voice was cold.

Steele bound Jim's arms behind him with the baling wire, twisting it securely with the pliers. He fastened strands about his knees and his ankles and finally gagged him with a table napkin, laying him in the Morris Chair which he set back to the full extent of the rods.

"You next, Petie," he said.

Pete emerged clumsily, stiff from his crouch, to be treated in the same way.

"Now you've got front seats," said Steele. "You can watch the performance. Will you bring in the coffee, Miss Deming?" While she was in the kitchen he stepped outside and scanned the landscape carefully. He clambered quickly to the top of the tall rock for a more comprehensive view. From his eyrie he could command all the valley and the gap through which the road entered. Satisfied, he stooped and examined the ends of several cigarettes.

"Tailor mades," he muttered and tossed them away.

"Sorry to keep you waiting," he told the girl as he reentered the house.

She laughed up at him, five-foot-four to his six-feet-two, but the laugh was not in her eyes. They were serious.

"I warmed up the food while you were gone," she said. "Is it all right? I confess I'm hungry."

"Watch me," he answered. The eyes of the deputies rolled in envious anger as Steele and the girl ate their meal.

"We won't stay to wash the dishes," he said, "though it's against my bachelor principles to stack 'em. Lucky you chaps brought along some extra cartridges, we might need 'em," he went on, as he buckled on the cartridge belt he had removed from Jim and filled his trouser pockets with the shells from that of Pete. "I'm out of smokin'," he continued. "This ain't like the Bull brand but it'll do." He stuffed his shirt pocket from the humidor on the mantel and, unperceived by the girl, picked up something which he concealed inside his shirt.

"Now then, we're off," he said.

"Our horses are gone," she told him.

"Hines is a horse thief as well as sheriff," he answered. "We'll have to hoof it. My regards to Hines, Jim. Pete, you should have shared that sandwich with him. It's a serious fault to be greedy. *Adios, hombres.*"

Outside the girl looked at him doubtfully.

"Where are we going?" she asked.

"You want to find your brother, I take it?" She nodded her answer.

"I'll help you. I'm hopin' for a little chat with Hines, on the side. He stole my horse, not to mention yours. I set a sight by that horse. I'd hate to think of him keepin' compn'y with Hines. He'll get corrupted an' I've spent a heap of time trainin' him proper. Besides, Hines called me a liar an' it's agen my principles to allow any man to call me a liar, star or no star. I don't lie."

He led her around the house, towards the sentinel rock.

"You don't seem to take things very seriously," she said.

Steele paused and looked at her.

"I was never more serious in my life," he replied gravely. And she saw that his eyes matched his name.

"I saw some sign when I was out here before," he said. "And I want to take another look before we travel."

Again he mounted the rock and the girl watched the combined strength and agility with which he climbed. He came quickly down.

"All clear," he announced. "We'll start."

"Where?"

"Satisfied for me to lead this party?"

"Yes."

"I'm going to do the best I can for both of us. Understand that. You may have to trust me against appearances. I can't tell. We want to get in touch with your brother before Hines does. There's one or two things up at Twin Knobs I wouldn't want Hines to find, an' he might take a notion to go there. That can wait. Your brother smokes tailor-mades? I mean the kind of cigarettes that comes in a box?"

"Yes."

"Straw tips?"

"Yes." She answered this with a little reserve.

"Then he was up on top of that rock. I've a notion he saw Hines an' his bunch comin' through the cut yonder. For some reason they stopped, mebbe to water their horses. Likely that. For some reason your brother didn't like the look of Hines, for which I don't blame him. Seems like he was watchin' while chow was bein' fixed. When he tipped off the cheerful news the crowd faded, Chinese cook an' all. On foot. They've hid out. Hines is after 'em."

Her face looked old and weary as she faced him.

"I'll have to ask you to trust me too," she said slowly. "If Hines is after them it means they are outlaws. My brother went with them."

"If they are outlaws, so are we. Don't you worry over much about Hines."

"But you tied up his deputies. And you helped me get away. I think they made a mistake about you. But my brother—"

"Shucks! They made the mistake of not tyin' me. I ain't losin' flesh over them." He seemed persistently to avoid her references to herself.

"But I don't want you to get in trouble over my affairs—and my brother's."

"I've made 'em mine. You're a woman, an' a good woman."

"How do you know that? You don't know anything about me."

"Shucks!" The wisdom in his glance waved aside the question. "'Sides," he went on, "'twouldn't make no difference. You're in trouble, whether it's the fault of your brother or not. I'm a trouble breaker. Let's foller the crick down a ways. We'll keep in the timber. I've a notion Hines an' his pardners worked back along this way after they got rid of them extry horses. We'll see. One advantage of bein' afoot is we can keep out of their sight better than they can out of ours."

"But—I *am* in trouble," she said hurriedly as if she wanted to say something that was forced to utterance. "My trouble is my brother's. I don't know what it is. I only suspect something is wrong from—from things he wrote to me. He is younger than I am and he is easily led. Not really bad. Only—"

"Does you credit. He ought to have sense enough to savvy your brand. A kid is apt to trail someone he thinks is smart. Don't stop to think an' gits in too deep. But, even if he can't swim, maybe someone'll give him a helpin' hand—like you. Shucks, you ought to know the foolishness I pulled off afore my horns grew."

"That is just what happened. Then I

went away on this trip. There is someone who has influence over him. Frank said he was done with him. He promised me."

"Mebbe this chap is holdin' somethin' over him, or pretends he is."

"Yes. And I was afraid that he was here, that he persuaded Jack to come. Then—"

Steele took her by the elbow and led her into a grove of willows.

"One of these monkey-cats, I reckon," he said, "wanted Jack to paw out the chestnuts. Took good care he wouldn't be burned. You were afraid he was here an' then you were sure of it, when you saw this."

He pulled the pipe from inside his shirt and showed it to her. She shrank from it.

"That is Wes—the other man's pipe. How did you know?"

"Shucks! I've got eyes in my head. An' I'm usin' 'em most of the time they ain't shut. Ears too—listen!"

She saw him stiffen, his face intent. Then she caught the faint sound of galloping hoofs, deadened by turf or soft ground.

"Hines," he said softly. "Comin' this way. An' comin' back. By the sound I don't believe he's bringin' anybody back with him."

He drew her back into a thicket, where they crouched, silent, watchful. The clop—clop grew more distinct and soon Hines came into sight, riding fast, his face set in a frown. Behind him followed the deputies with the rifles. They pounded fast, making for the ranch house.

"Didn't want to interview him this trip," said Steele. "He'll keep. But I'd give a dobe dollar to hear what happens to Jim an' Pete. Here is where we burn the wind. Come on."

He moved fast, trailing the tracks made by Hines. The girl kept up with him, striding freely as a boy in her riding togs.

III

"YOU see," said Steele to the girl, "I figger our friend Hines had some reason for bein' up this way. Found some sort of trail an' lost it, I wouldn't wonder. Someone in that crowd along with your brother knows how to cover tracks. We'll see if we can do any better. It's a better bet than runnin' blind an' I've a little more than a hunch they follered the stream, myself. They've hid out somewhere. I reckon you'd like to git your brother by himself, to have a talk with him. If he ain't in too deep, you figger to help him wade ashore, prevent him from catchin' cold an' keep dry from now on?"

They were walking side by side now. The girl flashed a look at him, saw his brows raised in query, noted that his eyes were kindly.

"That is just what I want to do," she said. "But I can't imagine why you should do all this for me. You've got yourself in trouble with the law. You've helped me to escape, you're trying to help my brother and you don't know a thing about me."

"Shucks! My trouble with the law, you mean, is tyin' up that Jim an' Pete. That kind is better haltered than loose. As for Hines, he horned in on my affairs. I ain't worryin' about that part of it. As for the rest I don't aim to see any woman put in a calaboose or otherwise imprisoned by the kindest-hearted sheriff that ever signed a warrant. An' that's a long way from describin' Hines. You"—he gave her a look that held cordial goodfellowship but was shrewd with world wisdom—"if I figger I know anything about humans, an' I do, it bein' in a way in my line of business, I know a thoroughbred from a bad cross. Placin' you that way, as I do, I figger your brother bein' blooded. May be a throwback, but with good blood. An' that counts. It may run a bit hot but it'll cool, likely, give it time. This chap with the pipe, he's another breed, I take it.

You don't have to tell me no more of your affairs. But mebbe we can find a way to separate your brother from this herd. He ain't branded yet."

She flashed him a look of gratitude. Her eyes were moist and her voice trembled a little.

"The man's name is Burton. He has always had plenty of money, good clothes, a car. He is the sort to attract a boy like Frank. He isn't exactly flashy, but he dresses well; his manners, on the surface, are well enough."

"Interfere with you any, Miss?"

"Once. He won't again." Her eyes flashed. "He was always telling Frank he was a fool to settle down to work for a salary. Talked about using one's brains. This is what happened, to make me know what he was. He proposed that Frank should pose in Denver as a cattle rancher, open an account at the bank. Then there was to be a draft presented, after others had gone through."

"Savvy," said Steele. "You needn't go into details. This Burton was to be the monkey, your brother pussy. Draft was forged. If it went through Burton would get most of it, your brother a quarter, mebbe. If it went wrong, your brother would be caught. Burton figgered him for the kind who wouldn't peach. Knew he had honor an' the blood. An' Burton would fade. If it was pulled off, your brother would have to fade too. He'd be under Burton's thumb. Mebbe Burton might try to interfere with you again, havin' a drag, you see, 'count of your brother."

"That is just what I have thought. But I know Frank. I saw he was worried. He broke down one night and told me everything. Then came this letter from Burton inviting him up here. I suspected something and came on. I don't see how you have guessed it all. I don't know how to thank you."

"Don't try. Haven't done much yet. There are more Burton's than one roamin' loose on the range, slicked up coyotes with their mangy hair curled. There's a bounty on their scalps, too."

He halted, pointing out tracks.

"Here's where Sheriff Hines giv' up," he said. "See where they milled around. Now we'll take a cast."

They were close by the stream, fringed heavily with willows and cottonwoods. On either bank the ground, after a level strip, partly turf, partly shingle, sloped upwards, thick with quaking asps and undergrowth. Ahead, the valley closed in to the bed of the creek that fell in a cascade over a medley of rocks, a broken stairway some fifty feet high. Below the fall was a fairly deep pool, then it flowed on in a channel broken by smooth boulders, bleached under the sun. The current was swift, the depth apparently about five feet in the center.

Only the natural noises blended in a murmur of rushing water, softly waving branches, the whirr of cicadas. The girl looked at Steele with wide, attentive eyes as he moved hurriedly but without a wasted effort. He showed her where two horses had been ridden into the stream and out again, marked by displaced shingle, still a little moist.

"They've mussed up the original trail," he said, speaking softly. "I've seen a sign now an' then but—"

He leaped easily from where they stood to the almost level surface of a rock that topped others, more irregular, standing well clear of the water. He stooped, then knelt, examining the surface of the rock. Then he closely examined the upstream sides of the pile. She saw his puzzled expression clearing a little. In two jumps he made the other side of the creek and began casting along the banks, bending double, suggesting a hound on trail. Once he seemed to pick up something. Returning, he repeated his tactics to the foot of the fall, climbed up it a little way, crossed back to her side, springing from rock to rock, and came to where she sat on a shingle bar set with tall weeds.

"There's a scratch on that rock," he said, "made by hobnails. Hines and his pals wear cowboy boots, same as me. An' I found this." He showed a soaked cigarette stub, straw tipped.

"Your brother smokes too much for his health," he said drily. "I reckon he snitched this smoke on Burton. You see it's only ha'f smoked. Chucked it away when Burton looked round. Shows they came up stream. Took to the water about here—or to the rocks. They could keep dryshod and clamber all the way up the fall. They've fooled Hines. They'd 've fooled me if I hadn't picked up the trail above the fall. There's another thing—but it don't amount to much," he broke off.

"I shouldn't like you to be trailing me, if I had done anything wrong," said the girl. "Are you a cowman?"

"I've sat leather, roped, branded an' ridden herd for fifteen years, fairly steady," he answered. "Why?"

"You trail like—like a—"

"A what? A sleuth? Shucks, Miss Deming, a cowman natcherally has to learn trail. It's a part of his job. I'm goin' up above the fall. Won't be long. No sense in you comin'. Here—"

He handed her one of the guns taken from the two deputies.

"Why?" she asked.

"No especial reason. Just as well to go ahead. Hines might take a notion to come back. If you see a cottontail or willow grouse, try your luck for supper."

"Supper? I had forgotten about food."

"It don't pay. You see"—he viewed her closely—"you see, Miss Deming, if we're goin' to find your brother—why—we'll likely have to camp out to-night. I might have taken you over to the Twin Knobs house where you could be comfortable, but Hines is more 'n likely to take a trip over thataway an' camp there himself. Pretty soft quarters for him to overlook. Won't be safe for us to try."

"I thought you said you had some papers there you didn't want him to find."

"Did I say papers? I've got to let that go for a while. I've got things tucked away. There's a bottle or two of real Scotch whiskey up there an' while I sure hate to think of it bein' wasted on Hines an' his pals, it may keep 'em occupied a bit. Now, if I don't find anything up above, this is as good a place to camp as any. Sun's gettin' down. If you don't shoot anything I aim to trail back to the house after dark an' rustle some grub an' blankets."

She saw him looking at her quizzically, wondering, she fancied, whether she was going to show herself a prude, bothered about the proprieties in an emergency like this. He had taken her on trust. She felt that she could trust him, without reservation.

"It's a risk, isn't it, going back for food and blankets? We could get along without them for once. I've camped out before."

A smile softened the stern look of his mouth and his eyes. For the first time she heard him laugh, showing his white teeth, a whole-hearted laugh that sounded like a boy's. It made her feel as if she had known him and trusted him for a long while.

"I won't take any risk I can't git away with," he assured her; "just rustle some grub an' coverin' an' git back my own guns. I've a hunch Hines may have loaned 'em to Jim an' Pete, seein' they're shy of hardware. But it'll have to be after dark. We may be right hungry before we eat. You won't be afraid to be left in the dark?"

She shook her head, smiling, and he laughed again.

"I reckon you're what my friend Sangster, who owns Twin Knobs, calls a Three-P woman."

"What's that?"

"Somethin' sort of rare, like the difference between free ore an' fool's gold. Pal, pardner an' playmate! Bill Sangster's lucky. He married one of that

kind. She's up to the mines, to Flivver Creek, now; playin' mascot, or workin' at it, rather."

His eyes, absolutely frank, precluded any suggestion that he was trying to establish closer relations between them. The girl accused herself for harboring the idea. To cover her confusion, she spun the cylinder of the gun, examining it.

"Not so complicated as a typewriter," he said, standing in front of her.

"How did you know I was a stenographer?"

"Didn't. Guessed. You'd prefer to play with a gun, mebbe."

"To play with what it stands for, free life and fresh air."

He gave her a little friendly nod and strode off. She watched him clambering up the fall, disappearing over the top, her eyes a little hazy, a little dreamy. "You couldn't call this man rough," she told herself. Roughness suggested something unfinished, a machine before it is assembled. He might lack paint and varnish but he was most eminently efficient, sound, altogether a man.

It was over half an hour before Steele came back. Already shadows were deepening in the little gulch between the hills. His face was hard set. He had not found any sign though he had been thorough in his swift survey. He did not climb down the cascade but detoured through the aspens, coming out close to where he had left the girl. There was no sign of her.

Frowning, he beat about. He saw tracks to indicate where she had gone down to the creek. And that was all. Working swiftly, he made certain there was no other indication. She had vanished, her trail lost as had been that of her brother and Burton, and the rest of the little household.

He surveyed the stream. Once more he landed on the flat rock where he had seen the distinct scratches of a heavily nailed sole that had scored on landing. Again he bent and narrowly observed the borders of the upstream rocks, rising with a frown in two deep lines between his brows. Straightened, he covered every inch of the clear water. A gleam shot from his eyes and he sat on the big rock, lowered himself to the water and waded down the channel to where a bar broke it into riffles. There he picked up something, brought it up stream in the palm of his hand, tossed it into the water in half a dozen places, watching it slowly sink and go skipping lightly over the bottom, swayed in the sub-currents, to land at last in the same spot from which he had first retrieved it.

He held it in his hand for a moment before he tucked it away in the pocket of his shirt, searching the gulch meanwhile. It was a celluloid hairpin. He rolled a cigarette, smoked it to the end, pinched out the stub, then threw it on one side as if abandoning caution as unnecessary.

Then he struck the trail back to the house, going swiftly, silently through the gathering dusk, alert as an Indian, his face grim.

IV

JUD STEELE was not the type that wastes time over theories that prove untenable or cannot be worked out to a legitimate conclusion. He arrayed facts as he found them, fitted them together and, if they did not solve the puzzle, waited for more facts to be evolved.

One idea, that Hines might have returned and carried off the girl while he was above the fall, was soon exploded. Hines was unable to move without leaving a trail; there was no trail. The girl had vanished just as her brother and his companions had vanished—save for one thing. They had obliterated themselves voluntarily; he was not so sure about the girl. It was a mystery that he could not immediately solve; he had other things to do.

The sunset flamed and began to fade before he cautiously approached

house once more. He could see a light moving in the living-room. It settled, a figure moved in front of it. Steele went around to the barn, cat-footed. Two horses were in the stalls. He did not bother with them. For the present he preferred to trust to his legs.

He snooped about the barn and found, at the end of an alley, between empty swingracks for cows, a feed-room. It was substantially built, without a window, with a sturdy door that fastened with a good padlock. There were bins built in, partly filled with grain. Satisfied, he left the barn and approached the back of the house. There was a light in the kitchen. He advanced under the cover of bushes close to the window, then snaked his way up to the logs of the house, rising, inch by inch, until he could peer in. The man Jim was busy at the stove with a frying pan. Steele grinned.

"It's a shame to cheat 'em out of another meal," he said softly to himself as he crawled off, rose and went round to the front. But he did not say it with conviction.

Reaching for the veranda rail, concealed in a thick vine, ready to climb to the porch, he heard the door open, a creak on the planks. A man came out and walked in his direction, then stood as if listening. Steele froze. Someone was taking advantage of the last of the daylight to watch for just such an invasion as he contemplated. Then came the scratch of a match, the scent of tobacco, which he recognized as the mixture from the jar on the mantel. That would be Jim. He waited.

A voice called from the inside, the voice of Pete.

"Chuck's ready. All set. See anything?"

"Nope." Came the sound of retreating footsteps, the closing of the door. Covering his own sounds of movement with these, Steele swung up and over the [illegible]. The planks did not creak under his [illegible] as he tiptoed to a window. Jim stood by a chair, pipe in mouth. Pete waved a knife over a smoking platter. Steele gently tried the latch of the door. He was sure it was not bolted. Jim and Pete were not past masters of their profession. Steele shifted the gun in his holster, tried the door slowly, opening it a fraction at a time, ready to swing it wide. He wanted to hear, if he could, what the pair would say before he disturbed them. If only they were busy with the food? They should be hungry, and, with men of their calibre, the appetites always dulled the mental faculties, he reasoned.

The door swung slowly out until the merest film of light began to show. He heard the sound of cutlery on the plates, the clink of cup and saucer, little noises that told of crude table manners. Then—

"Hines has sure got one hell of a temper." This from Pete. He knew their voices apart.

"To hell with him and his temper," answered Jim. "He may be runnin' this show but, when it comes to payin' off, that's another matter. Your a good cook, Pete. This ham is prime."

Pete chuckled.

"I'll say it is. Wonder what Hines struck up to Twin Knobs?"

"Meanin' grub? They've jest about reached there by now."

"Meanin' grub, yes; also the stuff. If this chap Steele was in cahoots with the bunch they may have hid it out there. Don't stand to reason they'd vamoose and leave it here to be turned up."

"'Less they took it with 'em. I don't believe Steele is in with 'em. He took things too easy. Hines said Steele wasn't any one of their names."

"Suppose he'd give the right one? Have some more ham. I cooked a plenty."

Steele had learned what he most wanted to know. Hines was at Twin Knobs with the other two men. And the roan was there also. He swung the door wide and, as the two eaters turned peering

into the darkness beyond the threshold, he stepped into the light, his gun covering them.

"Sorry to disturb you, hombres. But I gave you one helping of grub. Keep your hands above the table cloth."

His gun spat viciously as Jim dropped his right hand, farthest from the door, to his holster, and brought it up again. Jim screamed an oath. A gun, one of Steele's own blued Colts, thumped on the table. Blood spurted across the cloth from Jim's knuckles shattered by the shot.

"If you've spoiled that ham and eggs I'll make you eat it one-handed, with the salt cellar sprinkled over it to lessen your freshness." The raillery in Steele's steady voice was undershot with grim earnestness.

"Git up, both of you, grab for the ceilin'. Never mind your hand, Jim. Your own fault. I never bluff with a gun. Now stand still."

They stood while he appropriated both his own weapons, putting away the third in his hip pocket, handling the guns with the dexterity of a juggler while they eyed every movement.

"Now, you Pete, tie up his hand with one of them napkins. I'm not going to bale you up this time. Pete, step back of Jim, hand on each shoulder. Lock step to the door, not too fast."

He set the muzzle of a gun to Pete's back and marched them under the fading afterglow to the barn and down into the feed-room, where he slammed the door in their faces, snapped the padlock, listened to their muffled threats with a mocking smile and chose one of the two horses, saddling it swiftly and leading it to the back of the house where he anchored it with trailing reins.

"Three's all of 'em I care to use," he told himself as he entered the kitchen. He ate quickly, with front and back doors open, listening intently all the time, a napkin spread over the offending blood spots. In some ways Steele was more fastidious than others. "Ham and eggs twice a day ain't too much," he said aloud as he finished what remained of the hot coffee. Then he sat back deliberately, rolled a cigarette and smoked it slowly, thinking, while his face, relaxed during the meal, hardened to determination again. Once a little smile crept round his lips.

He swung himself into the saddle, grinning at the pounding of Jim and Pete on the stout walls of their prison, and set his mount to a lope. Steele knew a trail once he had passed over it, and he rode without hesitation across the valley and set the horse at an angle to the slopes, reaching the rim within a few feet of where he had come out of the pines in the morning. This time he did not hesitate but rode on, through the trees in the darkness, trusting to the eyes of his mount, to his own sense of general direction, striking a bare ridge and loping steadily on until he once more turned down grade and, in half a mile, struck a road. Along this he galloped, testing the speed of the horse, which was a good one. He turned off at a gate, entered, left the dirt road for turf at the side, reined up back of some outbuildings, left the saddle and walked down a cattle lane between a corral and a barn. A half moon was lifting over some hills, tangled in trees. Two rounded knobs, parked with bushes, with some tall pines atop, saddled by a ridge, rose a short distance away. On the short ridge showed the blurry outline of a long, low house. Two oblongs of orange light glowed steadily. Steele chuckled softly.

"At home," he said. "They won't feel that way in a minute. I hope they haven't finished all the Scotch."

A whinny came from the corral. He looked through the bars at a bunch of horses moving in its far corner. He gave a low whistle and one of them came forward, slowly, then with an eager nicker. It was the roan.

"All right, you old pie-eater," said

Steele in a low voice. "I'll be round for you presently. Hope you've had a good feed."

He spun the cylinders of his own guns, balancing them in his hands with satisfaction, then made straight for the ridge and the Twin Knobs that gave the name to the holding of Bill Sangster, now absent with his wife at the recent strike at Flivver Creek. There had been some attempt to beautify the approach by trimming the natural growth; the scent of garden flowers came to him, wet and dewy as he threaded a path, knowing the way, gained the pergola that ran along the front of the house, and once more spied through unscreened glass.

He saw Hines, with his other two men, Red and Shorty, seated in front of a fire, smoking cigars—Steele's own cigars. Two bottles were on the table with glasses, one bottle empty, the other containing about a third of its original quantity. A gun in his left hand, Steele opened the door, passed in, his second pistol coming out of the holster in a flash of blue steel as he kicked the door shut behind him and smiled at the astonished trio, starting to rise from their chairs and reaching for their guns.

"No sentry, Hines? Careless. Be seated gents. I've come to talk business." He had the drop on them. Hines dropped back in his seat with a nod to his deputies, who followed his example.

"Ready to talk turkey, are you, J. J.?" asked Hines. "You know what you say may be used against you. I'm not promising anything."

"You can rope the bull, Hines. Never mind that kind of chatter. I'll have something to say along that line presently. We can work together. But the favor is on my side, don't forget that."

The two men measured glances. Each felt an increased measure of respect, made a new estimate of the other.

"I've underrated you, Hines," said Steele. "You can carry a bluff. But I've read your hand. Mine's all trumps."

"You pack two aces," said Hines coolly.

"I know how to play them."

"Have a drink?"

"Thanks," said Steele. "I see you've helped yourselves."

"To Sangster's liquor, not yours."

"That ain't the first error you've made, Hines. I'll have a drink, but I'll trouble you to pour it. You do it, Red," he added to the taller deputy of the two, whose hair, what was left of it in straggly wisps, had evidently given him his title. "There's a clean glass in the sideboard over there." Red glanced at his leader and got up surlily. Steele sat backwards astride a chair, watching every move of the three men, his wrists on his knees, guns in his hands.

"Particular, ain't you?" growled Red.

"Always have been, since a mere child," replied Steele. "Thanks. You needn't hand it to me. Set it down on the table an' shove over the cigars." He helped himself to the whiskey glass, and then a cigar, with one hand, one Colt still covering the trio. He bit the end off a cigar, produced a match and flicked it to a light under his nail.

"Now then," he said, "we'll talk. Me first."

"I'm goin' to make you a damned good offer, Hines," he went on. "Bear that in mind. I'm figgerin' you savvy how to read your own hand, as well as how to play it. Also when to lay down a poor one—or get out of a game before you git in too deep. I've come up quite recent from Arizony, at the suggestion of a friend of mine, an' you don't know a darn thing about me, 'cept that I pack two guns. I know a heap about you, from a friend—same friend. You got no right to sit at this game, Hines, an' you know it. I'm givin' you a chance to git out—not because I'm what they call a philanthropist but because I'm figgerin' on usin' you."

Red and Shorty were looking at him astounded, equally so at Hines, who sat

imperturbable, his cigar cocked in the corner of his mouth, his eyes intent on Steele, listening to every word with an interest that was manifest enough, for all his pose.

"Go on," he said. "If you ain't no philanthropist I ain't no object of charity, neither."

"All right, Hines. There are some things I like about you. Your manners to'ards ladies need parin', bad; an' your judgment concernin' 'em is mighty poor. But that's mebbe the result of your bringin' up. Now then. Red an' Shorty is in this game, bein' interested in your stake money; an' me needin' 'em after a bit. Jim an' Pete, they're out of it. Thrown up their hands. Go easy, gents," he rapped out sharply as Red shifted in his seat and a dull red flushed under Hines's skin. "I ain't talkin' just to listen to myself. I'm goin' to show you a few of my cards, Hines. Make it stud poker 'stead of draw."

"Ten years ago there was quite a strike of low grade ore nigh to here, they tell me. Petered out—an' they called the place Flivver Creek. Last year someone strikes again, high grade this time, and the diggin' don't flivver. Takin' out sylvanite worth five thousand a ton up, way up. So high up that a feller could snitch a chunk or two of it, say on'y a few pounds, an' call it a day. Some folks have been doin' that. Sangster's lost some of that rich ore. They figgered there was a regular gang of men workin' this high-grade racket, takin' it here one time, out of bins way off the next. Mebbe there was. There's a reward put up for the capture of the robbers. One thousand dollars. Amount of ore stolen nigher twenty thousand dollars. Might be double that. Hard to tell.

"Naturally, any strangers round here are suspected; that way you suspected me, right off; that way you suspected one or more of the men livin' over to the valley ranch that neighbors this, where you run in on me this mornin'. Aimed to arrest 'em for high-gradin'. Thought I was one of the gang. Well, I'm not, Hines. Git that. More'n that, I'd like to handle that thousand bucks reward myself. I can use it, more ways than one. You-all trailed those four fellers an' their Chink up the stream an' lost 'em. So did I. You come over to Twin Knobs thinkin' I may trail over here with the lady, an' you make yourselves considerable to home. Now I'm here.

"Hines, I don't see you've got even a pair in sight. I know you ain't got a thing buried. I have. Before I turn up I'll tell you what I want. I've got a hunch I can find that high-gradin' crowd. I've got a hunch they'd be out of the country to-night if you hadn't taken their horses. They ain't the kind used to walkin', 'cept mebbe the Chink, an' one man, who's a miner, by the look of his boots. Also they hate to leave the stuff where they've cached it. It's heavy to tote. I can handle 'em easier with you three. It's hard to git the drop on five men all to once an' take care of a lady at the same time."

"She's with 'em, is she?" said Hines.

"I'm bettin' that way."

"You want us to help round 'em up, so you can git that reward?"

Steele only nodded.

"Don't even want to split it?"

"I'll give you whatever part of it you feel you're justified in talin'," said Steele.

The three sheriffs looked at each other uncertainly, then at Steele. Hines winked at his deputies.

"All right, that goes," he said. "We'll help you, seein' you figger you know where they are. Suppose we-all split the thousand three ways an' you take the girl."

Steele's little finger, flicking at the ash of his cigar, stiffened. The forefinger of the other hand curled about the trigger of the gun. His eyes gleamed as they moved between the lids, menacing in the triangles that showed gray and cold as shadow ice.

"I told you once about parin' your manners, Hines," he said. "Clip your words when you talk of ladies, unless you want me to use lead scissors. Savvy?"

Hines forced a laugh.

"No offence meant. Git down to business. When do you aim to lead us to these high-graders?"

"Now. Give me your gun, Hines, an' hand me your cartridge belt."

"What in hell do you take me for?"

"A wise man. Hand 'em over or I'll come an' take 'em. You Red an' Shorty, likewise. Pronto!" Steele rose to his feet lithely as a cougar rises from a crouch, his two guns with their muzzles slightly raised, muscles flexed, man and weapons ready for instant action, backed by a will that made itself felt. "Do you suppose I am sucker enough to fall for your idea, Hines?" he said. "Expect you to help me hold up these high-graders without your givin' me the double-cross? I'm goin' to give you back your guns—unloaded. They'll do just as well for a bluff. I can shoot straight enough an' fast enough to take care of what shootin' may be necessary. You can ask Jim about that when you see him. One at a time, now. Lay the belts down on that end of the table. Hold the guns by the barrels."

"You've got the drop on us," said Hines sulkily. "But, talkin' about suckers, what kind of poor fish do you fancy we are to take a chance with empty guns in your game?"

"Weak fish, Hines. Stand back." Steele swept belts and the shells he had ejected from the guns into a drawer of the table. His voice held authority, crisp and resolute. "Come over to this desk, Hines," he ordered and Hines obeyed. "Don't try to make a break for that table, Red or Shorty," he warned. "You'll never touch the handle of the drawer. Hines, I was afraid you might have rummaged around a bit, but I see you stopped at the whiskey and the cigars. Now I'll turn up my buried cards. Take a look at those letters on top of the little drawer to the right as you open the desk. There's a paper or two that may interest you."

"I thought you said your name was Steele," said Hines sullenly, after he had gone through the papers.

"It is, up here," answered Steele. "The other one got in the papers once or twice. If you still feel justified in claimin' any of that thousand, Hines, you can have it. Otherwise, I play as I said I would. I give you a chance to git out of this game you've set into, losin' nothin'."

Hines hesitated.

"You called me a liar, once, Hines. I ain't had any apology for that—yet. If I was you, I wouldn't double up that apology. I'm givin' you five minutes to tell Red an' Shorty just where you find yourself. Then you can saddle up your horses. I'll saddle mine an' Miss Deming's. We'll take the others along. Saddles for them left over to the other house, I reckon. We can get along without 'em. One saddle on the horse I borrowed from Jim, or Pete. Pick up your guns an' git busy."

He finished the Scotch and selected another cigar while the three talked in whispers. Only two of the minutes were needed for decision. Red and Shorty were surly, but cowed. Hines regarded Steele with a reluctant look of tribute. Ten minutes later the four men, Steele on his roan, rode out of the Twin Knobs gate and proceeded along the road that led to the valley holding. Red herded the four unsaddled horses, Shorty led the girl's.

They turned off where the creek first looped across the road and loped at an angle across country. All dismounted. Two lariats, fastened to convenient trees, made a picket line to which the horses were attached by bridles and halters. With Steele directing the three in front of him, they made their way to the bank of the gulch through which ran the creek.

The quarter moon shone on the waterfall. Steele stationed them in the trees. By this time they obeyed him willingly enough. They held knowledge that made them content to trust to his proposition, since there was no comfortable alternative.

Steele snaked out into the open, creeping in the hollows between the shingle bars, peering through the rank weeds at the water, working down close to the edge. He did not go into the stream, nor did he leap to the flat rock, but wriggled back after awhile, his face showing satisfaction. He had found no fresh sign and he had not wanted to.

"See that big flat rock," he said. "Watch it. Probably have to skin your eyes on it until after sunup. Split the time, if you like. Two sleep and one watch."

"How about you?" asked Hines.

"Me? I'll be about. No smokin', mind. If anything breaks foller my lead. Flash your guns if I tell you to. An empty gun is often as good as a full one —and a damned sight safer."

V

DAWN painted the rim rock bright coral, a ribbon of light that widened and crept steadily down the hills, chasing the shadows from the canyons, the valleys and the gulches, shining on the stream below the waterfall. A blue jay flew screaming from wood to wood. High up, a buzzard sailed, gaining elevation, seeing the sun long before the earthfolk.

Steele, leaving the dark of the trees before the valley began to lighten, leaving his three recently enlisted henchmen awake and ready for signal or emergency, crept down the creek and, none too willingly, took a position between two boulders that hid him from view of all but the birds, provided he lowered his body flat into the chilly water.

It was the only place from which he could view the downstream edge of the flat rock. This level-faced boulder rested on others that left little interstices between them. Those openings that looked down the current, in the general direction of the gulch, were the only ones in which Steele was interested. He had taken up a position that might easily become ridiculous in case of failure and there were a good many ifs connected with it; also a good many probabilities, certain small clues that were straws to show which way the wind was blowing, or so he believed. Hines and his two satellites were in the edge of the aspens, covered by brake, but he could watch them. He believed them cemented strongly to his own action by self-interest, the strongest of motives, self-interest that included their own personal safety. If one of them attempted to steal away, he had promised, in no uncertain terms, to see that he got no farther than a wounded rabbit could hop.

Half of him soaked, the cold water a sorry substitute for breakfast, he kept his vigil, striving to prevent his teeth from chattering, his whole body from being shaken by a chill, regretting that he had not brought along the last of the Scotch instead of drinking it the night before.

The sun lifted, began to gain warmth, to scorch down between his boulders, and still he saw no sign of what he believed must happen. The others were comparatively comfortable in the shade, couched on the coarse fern. The thought of Jim and Pete immured in the stuffy feed bin equalized matters a little. The mountain water was bitterly cold, all reaction had ceased and he began to fear a cramp. He could not stick to it much longer, he told himself; and there was but one other way, a way not so sure nor so to his liking.

Then, between two of the supporting rocks, he saw the glitter of a pair of eyes, surveying the gulch downstream. They were too large for any animal that might crawl under that ledge to its lair. Steele lost all sense of cold, his blood surged

strongly through his body, but he did not stir. The eyes vanished. Slowly the flat rock began to revolve on a pivot, out to one side, gliding over the smooth, rounding top of a large boulder. The figure of a man appeared, coming up out of what seemed solid stone. The figure was dressed in blue blouse and pantaloons of a dark shade, stuff that looked like a cheap grade of sateen, the clothes of a Chinaman. Steele saw the flat-cheeked, yellow face turn to right and left, the body change position, while he lay motionless, wondering whether he would be able to do what he had planned—to get up swiftly from his watery bed, move quickly as a lizard moves and make his strike before the man (surely the Chinese cook at the valley ranch) could take alarm.

The Chinaman carried a bucket. He clambered over the edge of the opening made by the sliding rock, stepped down to the pool, stooped, holding the bucket by bottom and rim, and plunged it into the stream. He did not lift it. Resting on one knee, he suddenly looked up. He had not heard anything, but he had sensed something, a shadow that fell upon the water. His almond eyes, glittering with suspicion, crafty, evil, gazed full into the muzzle of Steele's gun, saw the tall dripping figure back of the Colt, with its grimly resolute face, its steely glance.

For a split second they made this tableau while Hines and the two deputies stole softly out of the aspens and down to the edge of the creek, wading through to the pile of rocks.

Steele saw the top of a rude ladder showing in the head of a vertical shaft that the flat rock had covered and he spoke quickly, out of a corner of his lips.

"Let the bucket go down stream, softly, you heathen pirate, softly. Good! Now stick up your hands." The Chinaman hesitated, his yellow skin darkening with anger.

"Me no savvy," he answered, but he answered in a whisper. Steele said nothing. But, as his trigger finger tightened, the light in his eyes changed, heightening, and, with an indrawn hiss of breath, the Chinaman tossed up his hands, the arms crooked at the elbows. Too swiftly for the eye to follow a knife flashed in his right hand, taken from the back of his collar. Came a shriek that died to a whimper of agonized fear as the muzzle of Steele's pistol sharply rapped the elbow on what satirists call the funny bone. The knife described a shining parabola to the pool, cutting into it with a sharp splash, as if a fish had leaped.

"Tell Burton to come up. Sabe? Call him up to look at something."

Hate still lingered in those black eyes, bruised with pain, but deadly fear was in the brain back of them. The Chinaman had seen death before, had dealt it, now he read his own in the hard gray eyes of this man who had risen out of the creek.

"Mister Bu'ton, you come up along me," he called down. "I want you look see something."

There was a pause. It was silent in the little gulch, as Hines and Red closed in at a signal from Steele. Shorty deftly frisked the Chinaman for another weapon. There was a step on the ladder. Steele and his aides crouched, and the Chinaman felt Steele's gun muzzle in his ribs. Steele had let him lower his hand for the moment.

The man who came up the shaft was dressed in a gray flannel shirt, riding breeches and puttees above his well made shoes. A gun swung from a holster on his handsome belt of leather. He was dark, almost swarthy, good-looking in a cocksure way with his hair slicked back, a crisp mustache between aquiline nose and full lips.

"Hands up, Burton!" said Steele quietly. "No noise, please."

Burton's eyes widened in astonishment as he saw the four opposed to him, the Chinaman crestfallen.

"Double-crossed me, Ling, did you?" he said in an ordinary tone. "I'll remember that, later, when you need the black smoke, you yellow mongrel." He held up his arms and Steele frisked him of the gun, throwing it where the knife had gone, smiling at the look on Hines's face.

"I'm collecting the guns, Hines," he said, "just to be on the safe side. There'll be no dope where you and Ling are going, Burton. They are fussy at Canyon City. You can have your pipe back if you like." He handed the carved bowl to its astonished owner. "Now then, call up the next man, please. Hines, cover Ling and take him ashore."

Hines, with a wink at Steele that the prisoners could not interpret, prodded Ling with his weapon, taking him off.

"Next man, Burton," said Steele. "The jig's up. Clever hiedout, but your pal with the nails in his brogans left a trail all over the shop. Let's have him next. Call him."

"I'll see you in hell first!" exclaimed Burton with a savage flash of temper.

"You may have to wait some time but you'll be there sooner than you expect if you've made any trouble for Miss Deming."

"Out on her account, are you?"

"Out for you and the ore, Burton. Lookin' out for her at the same time." Burton began to laugh silently.

"You can have her, whoever you are, and welcome. I've tamed one or two, but I swear I'd have set her and that fool brother of hers outside hours ago if I wasn't afraid he'd give us away. He'd have run right into a posse first thing. And his sister has the tongue of a spitfire." He called down the shaft. "Miss Deming, you and your brother come up. There's a friend—" Steele gripped him by the throat, shutting off further warning.

"If there's a back way out of there, Burton," he said. "I'll settle with you for that."

There were light steps below, and the girl coming hurriedly up the ladder, a young man behind her. Steele released his grip. Burton nursed his bruises. Red took him in charge, marched him ashore, lined him up with Ling. The girl's eyes lighted up as she saw Steele.

"Ling and Burton seized me when you went over the fall," she said. "I was picking chokecherries. I couldn't use the gun."

"I guessed that," he said. "You left a clue behind that helped me. This your brother?" The youngster who faced Steele sullenly, showed plainly his relationship in his features.

"Look here," he said. "My sister told me about you. I wasn't in on this. They tried to make me; maybe they would have, but—"

"I'll take your sister's word for it, later," said Steele. "Got a gun on you? I'll have to have that."

"They took his away last night," said the girl. "He tried to fight for me, to get us out."

"Burton start anything?" She flushed.

"No. I think I gave him no chance." Steele permitted himself to smile in recollection of Burton's statement.

"Who's down there now?"

"Arkwright, a miner—he's a rough sort—and Hull, an assayer."

"Got the ore down there? The high-grade stuff?" Steele interrogated.

"Yes, we kept it there. *They* did. I was to make arrangements with the smelter to sell it. But—"

"Never mind that. Your tale'll keep. Arkwright! Hull! The game's up. Come along." There was no answer.

"You are not going down after them?" asked the girl anxiously. "It's a timbered shaft with a sharp turn. Arkwright built it. It goes under the stream. They'll kill you if you go down."

"I'll send a messenger," said Steele. "Arkwright, if you don't come up I'll bust up your entrance an' drown the pair of you. Givin' you one minute before I start in."

He took out a gunmetal watch, studied the racing seconds. Forty—fifty, passed. Then a deep voice called out.

"We're comin'."

"Arms up, hands empty, don't rush," commanded Steele. "Shorty, stand by."

A big man, enormous of shoulder, bowed of leg, bearded heavily, a gun at each hip, came out slowly, forcing a grin. Steele relieved him of his weapons, gave one to the girl, tossed the other into the creek. Followed a sandy-haired man with the face of a trapped fox: Hull, the assayer. He had an automatic in each back pocket.

"One of those is mine," claimed young Deming.

"You're better off without one, son," said Steele, and the automatic splashed into the pool. "One more gun to account for. Keep your arms up, Arkwright. He felt about the giant's middle and found the gun he had given the girl tucked under the miner's waistband.

"Deming, you and Shorty here bring up that ore. I reckon it's sacked. I'll handle these chaps. Can you make the jump ashore, Miss Deming?" The girl made the leap neatly. The prisoners were lined up at the edge of the aspen wood. Steele turned to Hines.

"You don't carry handcuffs, do you, Sheriff?"

Hines flushed as he shrugged his shoulders.

"You should, you know," admonished Steele. The girl looked at him, wondering where the jest lay. "Part of any real sheriff's outfit," went on Steele; "goes with the star. Well, I've got some in my saddle bags, as it happens. Link up."

He deftly joined Burton to Hines, left hand to right, Arkwright to Red, Hull and Ling together. Shorty he ordered to help Deming bring ashore the small but heavy bags of coarse canvas.

"Are you backswipin' us?" asked Hines, surveying his manacled wrist askance.

"Of course not; sheriff and prisoner, deputy and prisoner. All according to Hoyle an' Billy Pinkerton. I'm playin' square, Hines," he added in a different tone. Suddenly Burton reached out, snatched at the gun that hung by Hines' side, whirled him round, and pointed the pistol point-blank at Steele. The girl gasped a warning. Steele was bending over the bags of ore, untieing the cord that fastened the mouth of the sack. She struck at the gun as Burton pulled the trigger. It snapped. Snapped again.

"Not loaded, Burton," said Steele. He caught the girl as she staggered, her face white. She had jumped directly into the line of fire. In the reaction faintness grasped her.

Steele laid her tenderly on the shingle, raced to the creek, scooped up water in his Stetson and spilled it on her face. She was already reviving as the cold drops struck her.

"I'm all right," she said, sitting up, struggling to her feet, Steele helping her. "It missed fire. I thought he'd kill you."

"You're the pluckiest girl I ever met," said Steele emphatically. "You didn't know it was unloaded. Usually it's the other way round," he jested. "Just the same as if I owed you my life."

She reddened under his look.

"If you owe me anything," she said, "after all you have done for me, believe my brother when he says he has done nothing in all this. I will vouch for him. Do not arrest him. I don't quite understand who you are—"

"No need for mystery any longer," said Steele. "My right name is Kennedy, Bert Kennedy of Arizona, one-time sheriff; came up here on request of Bill Sangster to look into the high-grading goin' on at Flivver Creek. Bill's a friend of mine. So's his wife. You'll meet 'em an' like 'em. No danger about them not likin' you."

"Then you and Hines were both working for the same thing."

"Not exactly." He grinned at Hines.

"Hines and Red there, likewise Shorty, are my deputies, sworn in last night. Hines was just playin' at bein' sheriff. That star of his is a trick star. Got all the sacks, Deming? Good; we'll load 'em on the horses. Your's is back a way, Miss Deming. You hombres'll hoof it to the ranch house. Then we'll let Jim an' Pete out of the barn an' git Jim to cook us some breakfast."

VI

"YOU see," said Steele to the girl later, "I spotted Hines for a fake almost as soon as I saw him. That star of his is out of date, for one thing. He got on to the combination soon as I did. I've an idea that fox-faced Hull got scared and was playin' double, but I ain't goin' too deep into that. Hines aimed to make a mock arrest and clean out with the high-grade stuff himself. He didn't know me from Adam until I got a chance to tell him. I needed him, specially as they had corraled you. He's done nothin' worse than impersonate a sheriff this trip, so I made a bargain with him.

"I'm goin' to leave you an' your brother to Twin Knobs while I deliver my crowd at Flivver Creek. Hines an' the rest'll be heroes an' I'm goin' to let 'em split the thousand reward. I'm paid well over an' above that on a percentage of what I got back in this ore."

"Are you a detective, then?"

"I hope not. Just a sheriff an' a pal of Bill Sangster."

"How did you find out about that tunnel?"

"It just had to be. They couldn't fly. I found that cigarette end of your brother's. I found scratches on the rocks from Arkwright's shoes and I found the clue you dropped."

He showed her the hairpin, then put it away again.

"Don't mind if I keep that for a souvenir?" he asked.

"I wish I could give you something better. Anything."

"That's a rash promise. If I ever come to Denver I may look you up and redeem it." There was something in his voice that brought quick roses to her cheeks, made the lashes veil her eyes. Steele noted it and went on quickly. "And don't you worry none about that brother of yours. I've had a bit of talk with him. He'll go all right. You see, he's the same stuff as you. Won't assay so high, mebbe, but he'll pan out average."

She took the brown, greasy bit of rock he handed her, marveling at its weight in her palm.

"I am like this?" she asked him.

"That's the way I figger you. High grade!"

THE CUP OF GOLD

By HENRY LEVERAGE

A THREE-PART STORY

PART III

CHAPTER XIV

THE RESCUE

THE mate of the Standart hurried forward after setting the lantern on the deck close by the taffrail. Fay grasped the dangling halliards of the jack-staff and climbed to the top of the spar, where he attempted to catch a further sight of the boat.

He slid to the rail and leaped between Rake and the silent Dane. Already sounds came from forward announcing that the mate was rousting out Holgate and the officers of the yacht.

"Quick, look around!" commanded the cracksman. "See if you can find any other evidences on the deck. Give me that lantern."

The Dane moved to one side. He picked up the lantern. Fay took it, struck a match on his heel, opened the slide and touched the flame to the wick. A yellow light illuminated the deck.

The search revealed nothing save a double splotch of blood close by a life preserver which was hooked over a belaying pin. Rake pointed to this stain.

"Blood!" he said. "Hit's some of Yellow Top's blood."

"Or her kidnappers," suggested Fay, on hands and knees. "See, it's splattered. She may have put up a fight."

There were no more stains to be found. Rake and the Dane turned and stared around the deck house. Holgate, wild-eyed and clad only in a great ulster, staggered aft. Behind him was the Yankee mate and the captain of the Standart.

"What happened to my niece?" shouted the millionaire. "Who had a hand in this thing?"

"It looks like the work of water pirates," said Fay. "There was a poor lookout kept. Elaine was sleeping on this deck chair. A boat sneaked up and somebody snatched her before she could raise an outcry."

The yachtsman's face twisted into an incredulous knot. His thin lips tightened over yellow teeth. His glance darted at the planks. He reached and picked up the silk Tam 'o Shanter.

"Sure you didn't have anything to do with this?" he questioned. "I've heard reports of you, young man!"

Fay pointed over the stern of the yacht. "Your mate," he said, "and this lookout here, both heard your niece's cry. She has been taken in a boat to that estuary. See where the island is close to the mainland? I'd suggest getting out the crew, lowering at least two boats, and searching every launch and houseboat over there."

Holgate turned to the captain. "What do you suggest?" he asked.

"The same thing! I'll go on the bridge and see if I can get in wireless communication with the police. The crew will be ready to lower in a few minutes. This was rather sudden. I thought the trouble would come from shore."

Holgate nodded. "So did I!" he rasped. "We had the shipyard too well guarded. They came out here, whoever they were."

Fay gleaned from this conversation that the yachtsman and the skipper had expected something to happen to the Glorianna. He drew Rake to one side. The captain went forward. Holgate stood undecided, shivering slightly in his overcoat.

"Not a word about Big Scar," whispered the cracksman. "They'll miss him soon enough."

"Did 'e pull off this snatchin'?"

"I think so. I saw him rowing ashore at sundown. He said he was going for the mail. I don't think he returned, until he had his mob with him. He's taken Elaine to the Grace Darling, where they'll torture her until she tells where the bullion is located."

"That was a shifty move, Chester."

"Quite so!"

"Are you going to stand for it?"

"Not on your life! That girl has a heart. They'll not get away with any rough work like that."

Fay left the cockney's side and stepped to Holgate.

"I haven't much use for you," he said, "but I have for Elaine. Now, I'll get her back safely, if the captain and the mate and the police can't. We'll let them have a try. They want to search everything afloat on the estuary. They want to land a party from one of the boats and look in the shacks ashore. The mob that did the work may have had an auto waiting on the Boston Post Road. Your men must act quickly."

Holgate bristled with suspicion. "This looks like a trap," he sneered. "You're in it. You know too much. You—crook!"

Fay clenched his fist and thrust it under the yachtsman's weak jaw.

"I'm not half as bad as you are, sir! I never stooped to murder. You come off your high perch and down to cases! Get your girl back. I put you wise how you can do it."

A creaking of blocks, the squeak of outswung davits, the rush of half-dressed men across the yacht's deck, announced that the mates and the captain were lowering away. A sputter sounded in the wireless room. A bell clanged below decks. A furnace door slammed. Sounds came up through the ventilators amidships, indicating that a roused stoke hold and engine room force were getting steam on the engines.

There arched from the Standart's bridge a lizzard-colored rocket that burst with a shower of red sparks high in the night. It was a signal to the police patrol. It was not answered.

The captain gave the order to a bo's'ain to light another rocket and call the coast patrol. A flare showed to the east. It was far away.

Holgate went forward. He watched the boats leaving the yacht. Fay led Rake into the cabin, where he finished dressing.

"We'll give the crew until daylight to hunt around," he said. "Then we'll go and try to pick up Big Scar's trail."

"'E may be back 'ere."

"No. He's done with this ship. He found out all he could and then got his mob together. They're a hard bunch. I'll kill the whole mob if they harm that girl!"

A coast guard boat came alongside the yacht. Holgate, leaning from the bridge, told of the kidnapping of his niece. He pointed to where the crew of the Standart were searching the motor boats and sloops in the estuary. A police launch joined them. Lights showed from lanterns and lighted windows in houseboats.

"They've stirred up a hornet's nest," Fay told Rake. "They went hunting with a brass band. I don't doubt that Scar got safely away with the girl. They're making enough rumble to frighten him into flight. See, that's the Post Road over there. It leads to Bridgeport and New London and Boston."

Rake followed the cracksman's pointing finger.

"A swell getaway," he said.

"Too good! We better go forward and ask Holgate for a boat. It'll take a crook to catch a crook. I know just about what Big Scar will do. The chances are that the Grace Darling has already passed around the island. She may be anywhere. She may be renamed and repainted. It's up to us, Rake. The police are too stupid."

Rake agreed with this statement. Was he not at large with a standing reward on his head?

Fay thrust his automatic revolver into the side pocket of his coat. He pulled down his cap. He strode forward near the port rail of the yacht and climbed to the bridge, where Holgate stood between two engineers.

"I want a boat!"

The millionaire turned.

"You can't leave my yacht. I'm going to hold you until we get Elaine back. It looks to me as if you had a hand in this thing."

"I told you I wanted a boat, quick! Order somebody to lower one. Those boobs who went to the estuary are making enough noise to frighten the men you want away. They've got an hour more of darkness to hide in. The world is damn wide over there, sir."

Holgate wavered. "Quick!" snapped Fay. "A small boat and a man to row it. Give the order. There's one on the starboard davits. That'll do nicely. My friend and I are armed. We know about where this band of water pirates would take Elaine, if they were disturbed."

"You know too much."

"Perhaps, but get that boat lowered for us. See, one of your searching parties is returning."

Holgate drew the first engineer of the Standart aside and whispered to him. The man, a weezened mechanic, who resembled his master, nodded and stroked the stubble on his chin.

"Better let them try it, sir," he answered aloud. "Ye hae nothing at all to lose an' everything to gain. Ah hae no doot the girl was whisked deep inland. This mon may know where."

Rake passed under the bridge and climbed the rail. He began casting off the tarpaulin of the small boat.

"Get a sailor to help you lower!" shouted Fay. "Go on, it's all right. I'll be responsible!"

Holgate remained sneeringly silent. Fay slid down the boat's falls after Rake and a sailor had succeeded in lowering the boat to the water.

The cracksman went forward. He turned, narrowed his eyes at the seaman, saw that the man was broad-shouldered and muscular.

"There'll be ten dollars in this for you," he said. "Now, lively with the oars. Rake, you steer. Head for the other end of the island, away from the estuary. We're after foxes who know their business."

The hour before daylight brought the greatest darkness on the surface of the Sound. The stars paled and died. The lights of the great yacht became points and vanished. Fay crouched in the bow of the small boat. He searched for some sign of the Grace Darling.

Nothing moved. The boat rounded the Chateau and hugged the shore of the island. Fay cursed the coming of dawn. A slaty strata of clouds showed in the east. A flamingoed streamer shot to the zenith. A bird winged its way out from the rushes.

"No go!" snapped the cracksman.

Rake dropped the tiller ropes and balanced upon a thwart. He squinted toward the shore.

"Gol blym!" he said. "There's something."

A black touring car, gleaming with well-polished brass and bearing the outward signs of being a vehicle for hire, streaked along the polished surface of the Post Road. It disappeared in a clump of rushes close to where a rotting dock was thrust out into the Sound.

Fay had seen the same kind of cars filled with gunmen in New York. It was a standard make, much favored by the elite of the underworld. It gave results. It had speed.

"Head for that dock!" he shouted to the tired seaman. "Dig the oars all the way down. There, Rake, see that boat. It's a cabin-cutter. It stopped at the dock about fifteen minutes ago. It looks like the Grace Darling."

"You're tellin' the man to row away from it."

"We can't follow the boat and the auto. That's probably a switch made by Big Scar to cover himself up. He came through the estuary with the cruiser. He touched at the dock. He carried Elaine ashore and sent the Grace Darling over to the Long Island shore."

"There goes the auto!" screamed Rake. "See it, Chester?"

"I see it. It's rolling toward New Rochelle. That's a good driver!"

"He's stepping on the throttle."

Fay turned, balanced himself in the bow of the leaping small boat, and studied the shadowy outlines of the cabin-cruiser. He made out her green starboard and red port lights. He stared at these two lights. He suddenly shouted:

"Come around! Don't make for the wharf. That auto was a stall. I see it now. Elaine is aboard the cruiser."

"'Ow do you know?" asked Rake.

"Why, they're heading toward Long Island and the lights show they ought to be coming this way. They've switched sidelights!"

The seaman swung the boat. He glanced over his shoulder. He dropped an oar and mopped his brow with his sleeve.

"Right after them!" ordered Fay. "You've got to earn that ten dollars now, man. It's a long way across."

Fay stepped quickly aft, sat down in the stern seat and ordered Rake to assist the sailor with the oars.

"Each of you take one," he said. "I'll relieve you when either of you tire. Our only chance is to keep the Grace Darling in sight."

"'Ow do you know that Yellow Top is on the cruiser?" asked Rake, after rowing for a steady five minutes.

"They wouldn't have taken the trouble to shift the lights, if she wasn't. They overdid it. They're too anxious to get away."

"But 'ow about the motor car?"

"Big Scar 'phoned for some New York gunmen. He expected a fight. He sent them up the road for a stall. The car will be seen by the police of New Rochelle and Rye. It's a throw off."

"But suppose the police stop the car?"

"They won't find anybody in it except a group of rough-necks, who have a perfect right to be taking a ride."

Rake bent to the oar. The first clear rays of the sun revealed a white speck close into the Long Island shore. It rounded a wooded point. It vanished.

Fay took the sailor's place. He feathered the oar and set a pace which the cockney found difficulty in following. The light craft reached the wooded point. It swung over a sunken pier whose stones showed directly below the keel.

"We'll land here," whispered Fay, drawing in his oar. "The inlet can't be large. See, there a barn or house over there. The Grace Darling is probably hidden under the overhanging trees. The water's deep along shore. Now all out and put this boat into the grass!"

The inlet, apparently small from the Sound, broadened into a considerable body of water. Fay led Rake and the sailor through a narrow path which seemed endless. Now and then he caught glimpses of the Sound. Bridges were crossed. A stream was forded. Barbed-wire fences enclosed estates. A swamp caused an hour's detour. Dogs barked at the intruders.

Noon, under a blazing sun, found fully one half of the shore line of the inlet

unexplored. Fay discovered no trace of the Grace Darling. A motor boat lay at a private dock. He examined this. The side lights were in their correct position —red to port and green to starboard. They could not have been changed without a screw-driver. The slots in the screws were clean. They had never been tampered with by a hurried hand. There was no evidence of deck-stanchions or an upper structure, such as he had seen on the cutter.

"I'd say," he told Rake and the sailor, "that the best thing to do is steal this motor boat and make the round of the inlet's shores. It seems to be the only one here."

"There's a bloomin' cove watchin' us now!" exclaimed the cockney. "See him up on that lawn?"

Fay swiftly turned, stared at the aggressive figure of an undergardener who started to swing a hoe with a shooing motion, and said tensely:

"Walk on as if you didn't notice him. We can't take this boat until night."

The gardener kept staring at the trio until a hedge shut out his view. Fay drew Rake along a marshy path. The sailor followed in their footsteps. They sat down near an abandoned barn.

Evening came slowly over the inlet and the Sound. Birds were hushed. A soft land breeze sprang up. Lights appeared through the trees.

"We'll go back to that motor boat," said Fay, springing from a grassy nook and taking an observation from behind the barn. "We'll cop it, and keep it until we locate the Grace Darling. The cutter is somewhere within this inlet. It never went out."

They retraced their steps to the private dock and the motor boat. A piano's tinkling tune floated from the porch of a hidden mansion. A girl's voice rose and fell. A chattering fanfare of light conversation drifted down to Fay.

"Get in the boat while I cut the painter and shove you both clear. We'll try to get that engine running after we drift out. It's as dark as a pocket."

"Is this far enough?" asked the cockney as the floating boat cleared a low point which blotted out all view of the mansion's lights.

Fay went forward, closed the switch below the tiny, inlaid steering wheel, and stepped aft.

He retarded both spark and throttle. The engine was of four cylinder, four cycle construction. Its exhaust pipe ran beneath the water. There was danger of making a noise in starting up.

The carburetor flooded under his careful tickling. He waited, reached down and grasped the handle on the flywheel. The first turn gave no result. A second quarter-turn caused an explosion. He opened the throttle wider, advanced the spark a notch, and tried again.

A soft purring sounded. The sailor sprang to the wheel by instinct. Fay set the propeller so that it first backed, then drove the boat ahead. He pulled his cap over his eyes, felt the automatic in his side pocket, and motioned for the seaman to cross the inlet to the opposite shore.

"The only place we didn't look," he said to Rake. "The Grace Darling may be hidden there."

"Nice name, Chester."

"Yes. It sounds innocent enough. I venture that Elaine is aboard. I know Big Scar and Glycerin Jimmy. They will torture her in order to find out where the bullion is hidden. Watch sharp, now. Starboard, you! Easy there. Steady. Just clear that clump of bulrushes. What's that, Rake?"

"A shack ov some kind, Chester."

"Can you make it out distinctly?"

"Looks like a chicken house. That's what it is. It ain't no Grace Darling."

Fay's eyes gradually became accustomed to the darkness. There was a faint phosphorescence on the waters of the inlet. Stagnant creeks broadened into mud flats. The northern and

eastern shores were wild places with few habitations. They were ideal spots for river and Sound pirates.

The sharp-prowed launch glided through the water. A triangle of ripples marked her stern's wash. The screw was slowed as Fay pulled the throttle lever back to its last position.

Rake, eager as a ferret, peered over the gunwale. The seaman steered parallel to the shore line. Fay rose. He stepped on the after cockpit hatch which covered the engine. He listened. He turned and glanced aft. He saw, far down on the horizon, the yellow lights of City Island. Two hooded arms of the inlet restricted the view.

Suddenly and clearly there sounded a calling shriek within the marsh over the port bow of the launch. Fay wheeled. His hand clapped over the butt of his automatic. The shriek was repeated. It was the cry of a girl in agony.

"That's Yellow Top!" exclaimed Rake. "I'd know that voice in a million."

"Starboard, you," ordered Fay to the wheelman. "Starboard more. Right in there. Hold her steady. Now port. We'll land and go around that clump of willows."

The knifelike bow of the launch cut through a slimy mass of weeds. A half-sunken log showed over the bow. Fay shut off the engine by reaching past the alert seaman and opening the ignition switch.

There lifted on the air a sobbing that struck through each man's breast. Elaine's voice called brokenly:

"Help! They're hanging me. Uncle, help! Oh, help me, somebody!"

Fay leaped to the log, steadied himself by throwing out his arms, poised and started toward the clump of water willows. He heard the gruff undernote of Big Scar's voice. It was like a great dog snarling over a bone.

"Come across!" growled the yegg. "Come clean, kid, and we'll let you down."

Forgetting the danger, Fay crashed into the brush beneath the willows and waded into a slimy creek up to his armpits.

He held the automatic above the water. He saw the Grace Darling floating before him. The light that streamed through two side portholes turned the muck into golden quagmire.

Glycerin Jimmy crouched on the cabin deck. He had a rope and tackle rigged through a hole in the roof. He pulled on this rope, hitched it about a cleat and bent for a second and longer purchase.

Fay crept forward. His fingers touched the side of the cutter. His legs were knee deep in slime. He saw Elaine dangling within the cabin. Her yellow hair was down. Her face was twisted in torture. Her hands were triced to the line which ran up through the hole in the roof. Between her feet and the floor was an open space.

"Come across," grunted Big Scar. "Where is the bullion, kid. Where is it?"

Fay placed one elbow over the low rail of the cutter. He started climbing. He heard, above Big Scar's threatening voice, the sound of Rake and the seaman wading in the mud.

"Pull her up!" shouted the yegg. "Another inch, Jimmy. She's a tough kid!"

"I'll tell! I'll tell!" cried Elaine. "Let me down! I'll tell!"

Fay drew back the patent catch of the automatic, leveled the short barrel at Glycerin Jimmy's head, waited until the crook had loosened the hitch around the cleat, and fired.

The gun barked sharply. Glycerin Jimmy clapped a hand to his head, spun, reeled and fell over into the slime of the creek. He disappeared beneath a geyser of bubbles.

Fay was upon the cutter's deck like an agile panther. He threw open an after door and catapulted forward. He brought up standing.

Elaine lay across the planks where she had fallen in a faint. Big Scar towered

above her. His brutal jaw was thrust out. His hand was on his hip.

A snarl ran the circle of baffled yeggs. They reached in their bunks for weapons. A rocking of the cutter, a shout outside, a hoarse cockney voice giving orders to the seaman, showed that reinforcements had followed after Fay.

He was deadly cool. "You're surrounded!" he snapped as he released the safety catch of the automatic and leveled it at Big Scar. "Put your hands up. Get them up. Bail up, you dog!"

"Wot's comin' off, Chester?"

Fay dropped his eyes for a swift second. He saw that Elaine was in a faint. Rake, big-eyed and armed, crowded past the yeggs near the doorway.

"Carry her out to the boat!" ordered Fay. "Unbind her hands!"

"Hol' on!" growled Big Scar.

Fay turned the gun in his palm, stepped forward and brought its butt down on the thick head of the yegg. Big Scar reeled, fell to his knees and sprawled with his face twisted beneath his right arm.

"Any more of you want anything?" Fay's voice carried death in its timbre. His cap was off. His gray hair shone silvery in the half-light. The flame that leaped from his eyes was compelling.

"You rat!" said Alibi Ike. "You dirty—"

Fay was over the planks. He shoved the barrel of the gun under the crook's jaw. "Keep them covered, Rake," he ordered. "I'll finish this fellow if he says another word."

"I didn't mean anything," whined Ike.

"Get Elaine!" said Fay. "Carry her out. I'll cover you."

Rake and the seaman lifted Elaine. They backed through the doorway. Fay stepped after them. He waved the automatic from yegg to yegg. He thrust out his left hand and guarded the weapon. It was an old western trick; there was no way to rush through his guard.

He waited a minute. Rake called from the bank.

"Shall I send over Jim and the other detectives?" asked the quick-witted cockney.

"No," said Fay, "we don't need them. We've met with a bunch of sheep."

Big Scar groaned. His right arm jerked spasmodically toward his hip pocket. He tried to rise. He fell face downward.

Fay strode across the cutter's planks, and jumped into the creek. He waded to solid ground. He went under the willows to where the launch was drawn close up to the sunken log.

"All right," he said, springing aboard. "Make for the Standart. They won't follow us."

The fast boat was well out of the inlet before Elaine sat erect and stared at Fay. He had bathed her head with sea water. He had chafed her hands.

"Where am I?" she asked.

"Going back to your uncle."

The girl grasped a thwart and stood up. She ran her fingers through her hair.

"I told those scoundrels where the bullion was," she whispered. "I had to tell them, or they would have killed me."

"Where is it?"

Elaine trembled and glanced at her wrists. They were red and swollen.

"Don't ask me," she said softly. "Uncle would kill me if he knew I ever told a living soul."

CHAPTER XV

ADRIFT

THE Sound was crossed. The purloined motor boat drew alongside the Standart. A police launch and a coast-guard cutter were moored to the landing stage of the yacht. Holgate, his captain and three officers from shore, were on the bridge.

"Here I am, Uncle!" cried the girl.

The millionaire came swiftly down the bridge-ladder as an actinic light was pro-

jected from the chart house. His aged knees shook. He reached for Elaine. The two climbed over the rail. Holgate turned and shouted to the bridge.

"Call the crew aboard. We'll leave these waters, for good."

"How about the Glorianna?" asked the captain.

"She's well guarded. Double the guard with police. Cat the anchor and make for the Hook. No, make for Pelham Bay. Anchor there. I've seen all I want of this place."

Fay touched Rake on the arm.

"Out of the launch," he said. "Report to one of the mates. Tell him where we got the boat. They'll send it back with a sailor."

The seaman who had accompanied Fay to the inlet sprang to the landing stage. He turned. "I'll take it back for another ten dollars," he suggested. "I'll show the policemen where those people are hidden."

"They're not there now. Here's twenty dollars. You earned it. I've no doubt Miss Holgate will reward you in the manner you deserve. My one regret is that I'm not a millionaire—yet."

"But we're going to be, Chester," whispered Rake.

"Get aboard and notify the mate. Then come aft to the cabin. Let Holgate manage this kidnapping affair from now on. I've got an idea."

Rake appeared at the cabin door five minutes later. The Standart had dropped the police boat and the coast-guard cutter. The sailor had taken the launch back to the inlet. The anchor was up. The screws thrashed the water.

Fay emerged from the bath tub dripping. He kicked aside his muddy clothes and knelt by one of the bags.

"Clean up!" he suggested. "We want to get out on deck as soon as we can. Elaine told those yeggs where the bullion is. They'll make an attempt to obtain it. We've got to beat them to it, Rake."

"'Adn't we better wait, Chester?"

"No. We came after gold, Rake, and we're going to get it. I consider Holgate legitimate prey."

"But after savin' Yellow Top, like you did, 'e ought to do something 'andsome for you."

"He won't! He's a crazy miser. Our one chance is slipping by us. Big Scar has the whole New York underworld to call upon. Crooks, Rake, will be as thick as flies around City Island and Pelham Bay. Ten million in gold is a big lump of sugar."

"I'd 'ate to think they were going to beat us to it."

"They won't if Elaine will talk."

"She's a clam, at times, Chester."

Fay pulled on a dry coat. He examined his automatic. He drew a pencil and handkerchief from his pocket and cleaned out the barrel.

"Look your gun over, Rake."

"Mine's dry. I always keep my powder dry."

"Have it handy. Come out on deck. It isn't twelve o'clock yet."

The yacht was rounding the extreme northeast point of City Island when Fay reached the rail, nearest to the alleyway.

A yellow fog drifted in from the sea. It wrapped the standing rigging. It blotted out all view of the Chateau or the dwellings on the land.

The stately yacht glided for her new anchorage within Pelham Bay. A buoy was passed. A shout came across the water. A warning blare rose from the siren aft the Standart's funnel. There sounded a bell in the engine room. The screws ceased thrashing. A roar announced the dropping of the anchor. The chain ran through the polished brass hawse. The stern swung with the tide.

"Nice night," said Rake, moving to Fay's position at the rail. "I wonder why we're anchoring here?"

Fay glanced at the muffled figures on the bridge of the yacht. Holgate was one of them. The millionaire had sought

a secluded anchorage in which to spend the rest of the night.

"Rake," whispered Fay.

"Yes, Chester."

"We've played this game square as a die, so far. Now we change. We've got to look out for ourselves. Nobody else will. I couldn't stand by and see those thugs torture Elaine. I weakened a trifle there, Rake. I didn't intend rounding on my old pals the way I did. The whole thing came so sudden. I saw red!

"A good crook shouldn't 'ave a 'eart or a soul."

"It's what beats the best of us—those little omissions. Now we're going to stick to our object. We've got to locate that gold, cop it, and hide. That's what we came out to this yacht for—that and to find a place free from police."

"There's been too many bobbies for me, Chester. That bunch to-night what were lookin' for Yellow Top gave me the 'orrors. Then there's Gumshoe Ed and 'is side partner. I'm seein' police."

Fay rested his elbows on the rail. He stared at the veil of fog. In it he seemed to perceive forms moving. He reviewed the course of events from the evening Rake had switched checks on the trunk at Orangelands.

He felt gripped in a tidal flow which was irresistible. No twisting or turning on his part had brought him any nearer freedom. The police were searching the world for Chester Fay and Nollie Matches. Somewhere there was an indictment charging them with the murder of Frisbee, the yacht designer. The real murderer walked the bridge of the Standart—a free man. He was too rich to tap on the shoulder and say: "The chief would like to see you down at headquarters."

Fay's thoughts swung to the whereabouts of the bullion. The secret was no longer held by Holgate and Elaine. Big Scar and his band of yeggs were out in the night searching for it. They had the kicker-cruiser. They knew the waters of the Sound. There was the underworld of New York to aid them.

"Rake," said Fay, "we are children in this game. Big Scar is going to beat us to the gold. Elaine probably told him enough to set him on its trail. She does not realize that he can laugh at the police. Why, Rake, he's got Dan the Dude's money and influence behind him. Dan controls the politicians. Holgate will wake up to-morrow morning and find ten million gone."

"Where is it 'idden?"

"I believe it's near here. City Island isn't ten miles away. The Glorianna probably came down the ways. She is anchored in the fog. The tender is with her."

"But they told the bobbies to guard the yacht."

"The entire detective force of this part of New York could be stalled away by the rumor of a bank job, or something like that. Big Scar, particularly after last evening's affair, is going to take a long chance. He wouldn't have kidnapped Elaine if he weren't desperate."

"'E's—" Rake touched Fay on the shoulder. "Somebody's coming along the rail," he whispered.

Elaine appeared through the fog. She held her hand out to Fay.

"I'm feeling better now," she said. "I told uncle what you did for me."

Fay thought of the bullion as he released the girl's warm hand.

"Is that gold where Big Scar can get it?"

"It is and it isn't. Uncle thinks there is no danger. He has wirelessed for some New York watchmen to come out. They may not be able to find us in the fog."

"Then the bullion is aboard this yacht?"

"You're the most persistent young man I ever knew. You're thinking of larceny all the time."

"What else is there to think of?"

"Why, the yacht races which will take place soon. Then you might tell me what you know about the boys inside. I want to help them reform. You have a great future if you only apply your talents in the right line. Think of you giving lecture tours, under my auspices, all over the country. You know how it feels to be in a cell?"

"I know," admitted Fay. "So does Rake. We've both decided to get so much money we won't need to bother about the police. I tell you frankly, Elaine, I'm going to get some of that bullion."

"You'll have to find it first."

Fay glanced naïvely at Elaine. "What would you and your uncle dare do if I copped a big chunk of that swag?"

"We wouldn't dare do anything, I guess. We'd just take our loss. I'm sure uncle has thought of that. He has thought of almost every contingency. He told me before he went into his cabin, to-night, that you had cost him many precious hours of sleep. He doesn't know what to do with you and your friend. You came aboard and blackmailed him. You promised to behave. Now you're plotting against his wealth."

"It's after one o'clock," suggested Fay. "I'm going to turn in."

Elaine held out a warm hand.

"I want another promise!" she said.

"What is it?"

"That you'll keep your first one about the yacht race. That you won't start anything until they are over."

"I'll grant you that. But do you think there will be any race day after to-morrow? Look at the fog. It's what they call a pea-soup night in London."

"Blym hif it hain't!" exclaimed Rake.

"If it's foggy day after to-morrow," said Elaine, "the race will take place the next day. That is the agreement with Sir Roderick."

"Where is the Glorianna?" asked Fay.

"Somewhere over there," said Elaine, pointing toward the north and west. "Don't worry, the yacht is safe."

Fay went to his cabin when he heard Elaine's door slide slowly shut. He crawled into bed and left Rake eating the late supper which a steward had brought aft.

The morning was foggy. A series of long rollers lifted and dropped the yacht. Dripping yellow drops streaked across the glass of the portholes. A far-off foghorn signaled the passing of a ship.

Noon came with a glimpse of the sun. A police boat drew up at the landing stage late in the afternoon. The sergeant in charge had no news to tell Holgate regarding the Grace Darling.

Fay moved forward and stood within earshot of the bridge. The police had searched every creek leading into the inlet. They had stopped boats at Oyster Bay and along the North Shore.

"Murderers!" snarled Holgate, accompanying the sergeant to the head of the landing-stage ladder. "I'll offer a thousand reward for the miscreants who tortured my niece. You have a good description of the man who came from this ship. He was signed on by a shipping master on West Street."

The sergeant stepped into the police boat. It left the side of the Standart. A haze covered the waters. Fay leaned within the shelter of a ventilator and listened to the mates cursing the weather.

The plans had been made for a run to Sandy Hook that night. The British challenger had been towed to Atlantic Highlands. The Glorianna and her tender lay off the Chateau awaiting final orders from the owners. A deep-sea tug was standing by.

Fay saw the bridge boy come out of the wireless room with a tissue. Holgate snatched it from his hands. The millionaire put on his glasses, read the message, then exclaimed:

"No race to-morrow. The Yacht Club Governors have postponed it for one day on account of weather conditions."

The mates and skipper of the Standart nodded. They were well pleased. The

trip through Hell Gate with the racing sloop and the chances of that passage were more than they cared to attempt in the fog.

"We'll keep the same guard on the Glorianna?" asked the skipper.

"Same guard!" exclaimed Holgate. "Wireless the tender to that effect. This is going to be a dangerous night. See the damn fog?"

Fay moved silently aft. He found Elaine and Rake talking at the stern. The girl had one foot on a bucket rack. Her yellow hair was covered with a sou'-wester. A long tan coat hid her slender figure.

"The gang's all here," she said to Fay. "I'm lecturing your friend on his evil ways. He admits three first-class robberies and one bank job."

"That's more than he ever admitted to me."

"What have you done to gain such a name in the underworld?"

"I tried to steal a trunk once."

"That's not fair. Have you ever picked a pocket or forged a check or stuck anybody up?"

"Never, that is, hardly ever."

"What do they call forgery? A boy who was discharged from Auburn told me once. I've forgotten."

"A scratch. The crook who does the penwork is called a scratcher and the one who passes the check is a note layer."

"And what are pickpockets called?"

The girl kept looking at Fay.

"Guns and dips and wires and instruments and stalls and boosters and fixers. You see, there are many sides to that profession."

Elaine smiled. "Is it rated very high?" she asked.

"Not at all!" said Fay. "A good bank man or mobs man or con man wouldn't speak to a pickpocket. I suppose a pickpocket — I always call them guns — wouldn't associate with a safe blower."

Rake sniffed. "A safe blower's the best man—every time," he injected with feeling. "'E takes a chance. 'E don't make 'is money off of poor women. 'E goes right hout and get's it."

"There is something in that," said Elaine. "Good night, I'll have some more questions in the morning."

"Just a second," said Fay.

"What is it?"

"Are you going to be well guarded? Remember what happened the other night?"

"I don't sleep on deck any more. My maid, a bo's'ain and a policeman are near me in case of trouble. Uncle is also guarded."

Fay glanced at the fog. He shook his head warningly.

"Anything could happen in this weather. Be very careful. That mob of yeggs may come again."

"No, they won't come out to this yacht. I know they won't."

"Isn't the bullion here?"

Elaine glanced at her swollen wrists. Then she raised her eyes and smiled at Fay.

"Good night, fellows," she said, and disappeared around the corner of the after deckhouse.

"An ace!" exclaimed Rake.

"Too bad she's got about fifty million more than I have."

The cockney thrust his hands into his pockets.

"We're tryin' bloody 'ard to cop some ov her money," he said ruefully.

"Without a particle of success. I don't know any more now than when I first came aboard. The bullion went right up in smoke, Rake."

"Maybe hit's fools gold, you 'ear about. I was in Colorado once. I saw lots of that kind of gold. It slickered through your fingers and was gone."

"This is a material bunch of swag—for somebody. Holgate has it planted near where he is. He didn't have it brought to City Island for a get-away. He brought it for some other reason, Rake—a reason that Big Scar, Elaine

and her uncle know. We're the only ones who don't know."

"And we took all the chances!"

Fay tried to pierce the fog. He shook his head. He turned away from the dripping taffrail and went forward.

A brooding silence hung over the Standart. Shrouded figures stood on the canvas-covered bridge. A smudge of yellow smoke drifted from the funnel. A faint light showed now and then at the engine room companion way.

The murky waters of the Sound rose and fell. The anchor chain grated in the brass hawse pipe. A shiver passed through the iron of the yacht. Drops fell from the standing rigging and splashed the deck at Fay's feet.

He waited and watched. The sound of the rotary-gap of the radio startled him with its menaces. A boy came out of the wireless room. He disappeared into Holgate's cabin.

Two bells echoed from the belfry on the forepeak. A lookout yawned and replaced a marlinspike in its place on a pin rack. A far-off ship's bell struck the same hour. It was one o'clock—by land time.

The bridge boy emerged from the millionaire's cabin and went into the wireless room. The rotary-gap started its reed-like note. Blue sparks seemed to surround a pale porthole. Fay leaned against the rail in the waist and drew his thin coat close about his body.

There came then, as he finished with the last button, a scraping of feet overhead, a shout, and afterwards confusion upon the yacht's bridge.

A message of import had been received. The bridge boy dashed wildly for Holgate's suite. The skipper emerged from a deck cabin. The mates on watch shouted an order forward. To Fay it sounded like: "Hell to pay! Get the crew on deck. Both watches."

Holgate appeared in his pajamas. He stumbled to the bridge walk. He started gesticulating wildly.

Fay coolly set about to find out what had caused the commotion. He climbed the ladder and strode toward the mates. Holgate wheeled, snarled savagely, and waved the wireless tissue.

"They've gone and done it!" he shouted for all the yacht to hear. "The devils! The imbeciles! The same pirate crew who kidnapped my niece. They've—"

Fay held out his hand for the tissue. Holgate, foaming and shivering, fell to the deck, rose to one knee, grasped a stanchion, and stood partly erect.

Elaine appeared from out of the winding fog. Her voice rose above the clang of an engine-room bell and the order from a mate to unshackle the anchor chain.

"What have they done, Uncle?" she cried.

"They've stolen the Glorianna! They boarded her and set her adrift. They wounded three seamen on the tender. There were over a hundred shots fired."

Fay stepped between Elaine and her uncle. "Why should Big Scar and his mob steal the Glorianna?" he asked.

"Why? Why?" repeated Holgate. "Tell him why, Elaine."

"Why should they?" reiterated Fay, turning to the girl.

"Because the keel of the racing yacht is made of solid gold! That's the reason they took such risks to steal the sloop."

CHAPTER XVI

RED DAWN

"GOLD!"

Fay glanced from Holgate to Elaine. He stared at the fog which blotted out all view of the Sound.

"Do you mean to tell me that the keel of the Glorianna is made of gold?" he asked the girl.

"Solid gold, yes."

"Why was it built that way?"

"To make the yacht faster!" snarled Holgate. "Gold is heavier than lead."

Fay partly glimpsed the truth. He started to question further. He was brushed aside by the crazed millionaire, who dashed toward a mate.

The Standart swung, steadied and darted through the fog. Her course was calculated to clear the point of land upon which the Chateau was located.

"Make toward open water," cried Holgate. "The pirates have a tow boat with them. They will try to get the Glorianna out into the Sound. We must intercept them."

Fay strode to the starboard ladder and went to the deck. He found Rake on the fore-peak. The cockney was peering through the night. His keen, long nose seemed to be sniffing the course.

"See anything?"

Rake turned. "Blym, no! It's dark as a beggar's pocket out there, Chester."

"No lights?"

"None at all. Wot 'appened?"

Fay clutched the cockney's arm.

"Big Scar and his mob boarded the Glorianna, cast her loose, and are taking her somewhere. They found that the gold was on the sloop after all."

"They picked a fine time. We'll never find them."

"This fog may clear at sun up. Holgate is banking on that."

" 'Ow did you find out about the gold, Chester?"

"Elaine says that the keel of the sloop is solid gold. I see the idea. Gold is almost twice as heavy as lead. Holgate used a new idea in yachting. He gets maximum weight for a smaller cross section on the keel. That's why the Glorianna is so fast."

"I saw the bloody keel when the yacht was on the ways. It wasn't gold."

"It was a steel casing, you saw. The gold is inside that."

"Blym, no!"

"It is, Rake. Remember that the keel looks like a torpedo. It's crammed with bullion. It's packed in there. Perhaps mercury is used to fill the spaces. Crazy Holgate has invented a new way to make a racing yacht. He used twenty tons of gold on the keel instead of twenty tons of lead. He has the weight further down. He has less water resistance. He could have used platinum, a heavier metal, and obtained better results; but platinum, twenty tons of it, would have cost hundreds of millions of dollars."

Rake sniffed and stared at the fog-shrouded bridge of the yacht. He bared his teeth.

"The old devil," he hissed. "So that's why we couldn't find the swag. 'E 'ad it planted in a safe place."

"Elaine confessed to Big Scar where the gold was, when they were torturing her on the houseboat."

"And they've beat us to it, Chester."

"They have," echoed Fay, with a sinking heart. "They're out there somewhere."

The Standart's speed was barely more than headway. Her sharp bow cut through the waters of the Sound with scarcely a ripple. No siren or fog horn sounded from her bridge. Figures crouched there—Elaine's and Holgate's and the mates'. All eyes on the yacht were searching for the Glorianna.

A looming mass, dimly discerned, turned out to be an anchored scow. The course was changed after a warning hail came through the fog.

"Make for Oyster Bay," growled Holgate from the bridge. "Try the Long Island shore."

Fay shook his head. He knew that Big Scar would attempt to get the Glorianna into deep water. It would be possible to cut down the sloop's mast, scuttle her, and mark the spot with a small buoy. The bullion could be recovered by a diver.

"They're going wrong," he told Rake. "The mob will avoid any chances. They'll sink the Glorianna in about eight fathoms of water. They've probably already done so."

Rake leaned over the rail. He listened with one hand behind his huge right ear. Suddenly he turned and exclaimed:

"I 'ear something over there! Sounds like a kicker-yacht. It went chug, chug, chug."

Fay rushed to the bridge and climbed to Elaine's side.

"Tell your uncle to slow down," he said. "Tell him to stop the yacht altogether. There's a gasoline engine of some kind working out there." He pointed two points off the starboard bow. "It's between us and Pelham Bay."

Elaine went to her uncle. She pleaded with him to change the course of the yacht. He shook his head. His glance swung and fastened upon Fay.

"Get off the bridge," he snarled. "What are you doing up here?"

"I thought you wanted to find the Glorianna."

"I'll find her. Get off my bridge!"

Fay went down the ladder, listened, and heard, above the soft beating of the yacht's engines, a far-off sound of a propeller thrashing. He marked the position, moved to the rail, and tried to pierce the fog. A denser bank rolled in from the east. The yacht, the funnel and the crouched figures on the bridge were blotted from his view. He went forward to where Rake stood.

"That man's a fool!" he exclaimed bitterly. "I'd like to help him, but he knows everything. He's missed the one chance of finding Big Scar and the yacht. It's right over there."

Rake shelved his eyebrows. He worked them up and down. A drop of yellow moisture rolled alongside his nose. He turned and stared toward the position where Fay had leveled a finger.

"Wot direction is that from where we are?" he asked.

"We're heading north. The sound was north, northwest when I first heard it. Now it's northwest."

"We'll remember that," said the cockney.

A half hour passed in vain searching. A bo's'ain stood in the starboard waist and heaved the lead. He called the fathoms to a mate on the bridge. The water shoaled. A bell rang in the engine room. The Standart ported her helm and ran along shore.

"He's given up," said Fay. "Now's our chance to have it out with him. He should lower boats and spread out over the Sound."

Elaine stood at the head of the bridge ladder as Fay climbed upward. He explained his plan for catching Big Scar and saving the racing sloop. He pointed west.

"They're over there!" he declared. "Tell your uncle that Rake and I heard the engine of the Grace Darling running. The cabin-cutter is probably towing the Glorianna. There is yet time to save the sloop—if we act quickly."

Whatever persuasion Elaine used was effective. The Standart came to anchor in four fathoms of water. Three boats were ordered lowered. Seamen sprang to the oars. The mates passed down rifles. Holgate left his niece and charged into the wireless room. He emerged and consulted with the captain. He turned and followed Elaine and Fay to the midship starboard longboat, which was held to the yacht by a painter.

Rake climbed over the rail. The boat was shoved off. It rounded the Standart's bow, grazed the anchor chain, and darted back over the course to City Island and Pelham Bay.

Fay steadied himself, placed a hand on a straining seaman, and stepped forward. He towered in the bow. He tried to remember the exact position of the sound he had heard. He sensed the compass point and the changes made by the Standart. The veil ahead was lighted here and there by an opal glow from above.

Now and then he held out his hand for silence. Holgate ordered the seamen to quit rowing. The boat tossed upon a

series of long rollers that came from the east. Sounds drifted to Fay of oars in locks. He marked the positions of the two boats from the Standart. He motioned to resume rowing.

It was almost dawn when Rake, whose ears were sharp, hissed a signal the length of the boat. Fay turned and stared at the cockney.

"Over there," whispered Elaine. "your friend heard something."

"It's one of our own boats!" snapped Holgate.

"No," said a sailor, "it's a launch. I hear the screw."

There came beneath the overvault of fog a series of sharp exhausts from a partly submerged muffler pipe. Silence followed. Fay felt Elaine's warm hand on his arm. The girl had crept forward with a rifle.

"Do you see anything?" she asked.

"Not yet. It's black as pitch. It's the darkness before the dawn."

"Row on!" cried Holgate in the stern.

Fay turned and made the motion of paddling.

"Don't make any noise," he whispered. "Paddle. We're close to something."

There came high overhead the towering spreader of a yacht. The slender topmast of the Glorianna showed between rifts in the fog.

"At them, men!" shouted Fay. "Row like hell!"

The longboat leaped toward the yacht's position. A warning shout came from the right. Big Scar's voice lifted and bellowed.

"Who's there?" he roared. "Keep away! We've got a tow!"

Fay whipped his automatic from his pocket. He heard Elaine ask:

"Shall I shoot to kill?"

"Yes. Crouch down and pump lead into them. I see the Glorianna. There's a man or two aft the mast. There's a light hawser between the yacht and the Grace Darling. See?"

The fog rolled away. The opal light revealed a straining cutter, a dipping tow-line and the graceful sheer of the sloop. A crimson flash splotched the night. A bullet whined between Holgate and Rake. The seamen bent far over the oars. The longboat closed the distance as Elaine started firing rapidly.

Fay reached out his left hand, caught the yacht's low rail, and climbed aboard. He dashed aft as the boat crashed against the sloop's side. He took aim, fired at the nearest man, and dropped to one knee. A form rose before him.

Fay pressed the trigger. He saw the man in the stern topple overboard, then turned and hurried forward. Holgate, Elaine and Rake were attempting to cast loose the hawser from the forward bitts. The line slackened. A shower of lead came from out of the fog. It splintered the deck. Holgate spun, clapped his hands to his breast, snarled and fell with his head in Elaine's lap.

"Get her rifle!" shouted Fay. "Answer that fire or we're beaten. See, Rake, there is Big Scar! He's loading his gun. Kill him!"

Harry Raymond, alias Big Scar, was directing the attack from the bow of the Grace Darling. Beside the yegg, two of his gang crouched. All three were waiting to leap to the yacht.

Rake's volley settled the fight. A salvo of curses and bitter oaths, punctured with shots, marked the sheering away of the cutter with its load of wounded men. The fog dropped a veil. Fay pinched an altogether useless arm, moved to the butts, and started drawing in the hawser. It had been severed by someone on the Grace Darling.

"We'll drift to safety," he told Rake. "Three minutes drifting and they cannot find us. How is Holgate?"

The cockney turned his head. He saw the millionaire lying flat on the deck. Over him bent Elaine.

"He's dead, Chester. He's the only one killed on our side."

Fay removed his coat.

"Mind dipping up a bucket of water?" he asked. "I was struck close to the shoulder. Part of my shirt is in the wound. I guess water will stop the bleeding."

Rake sprang to the rail, bent a line to a bucket and tossed it overboard. He hauled up the water. Fay dressed the wound. He allowed the cockney to bind it with a piece torn from his shirt.

"That'll do!" he said, gliding aft.

Elaine rose from her uncle's side. Her lips formed a prayer. Fay understood. He bowed his head.

A sailor dragged a small jib from out a sail locker. He covered the dead man. He waited as Fay led Elaine aft, seated her near the wheel, and came swiftly forward.

"Are any of you wounded?" he asked.

"None, sir. One man didn't get out of the boat. I guess he was afraid to."

"Do you hear anything of the cutter which was towing this yacht?"

The sailor shook his head. "We're drifting out," he explained. "I guess they beat it toward shore. The fog is lifting. We ought to raise the Standart in a few minutes."

Fay glanced at his watch. It was seven minutes after four o'clock. He went to Rake's side. The two men stood and watched the waters of the Sound slowly clear of mist. They saw the Long Island shore. The Standart was three miles or more away. She had just picked up one of the small boats. Another was being rowed in her direction.

Rake pointed to a bank of fog.

"There's more boats there," he said. "They look like police launches—yellow stacks and brass trimmings."

"Little assistance they were to us," mused the cracksman. "We located Big Scar by deduction and direction. He would have gotten away with all this swag if we hadn't arrived on time. They intended sinking the Glorianna."

"That was your idea, wasn't it, Chester?"

"It was my idea—but it isn't now."

"What changed you so sudden?"

Fay turned and stared at Elaine.

"I guess she did," he said. "She has her heart set on winning the final races. Besides I gave her my promise that I would help her all I could. I'm not one bit sorry for her uncle. I am for her!"

Rake looked at the girl, then turned and watched the fast-coming Standart.

"There'll be a lot of bloomin' things to explain," he suggested. "The old cove is croaked. Maybe they'll think we did it."

"The crew will be our witnesses. Elaine was standing by her uncle when he was shot."

"Now she gets all his money?"

"I suppose so. That lets us out from stealing any part of it, Rake. I wouldn't lift a hand against that girl."

"But we're standin' on ten million in swag. Can't we 'ook the yacht, tonight?"

"No, Rake! The jig is up! Elaine has been true blue to us. We couldn't round on her now. We'll go aboard the Standart and tell our stories. Then we'll leave the future with Elaine Holgate."

CHAPTER XVII

UNTANGLED

THE Standart, closely followed by the police boats, bore down on the drifting yacht, starboarded her helm and ranged alongside.

A bell rang in the engine room. The captain and a mate leaned over the bridge rail. They stared at the sinister-looking patch of canvas which covered Holgate.

Elaine rose from her seat near the wheel of the yacht. She grasped a reef point which dangled from the boom. Her voice, although weak, carried to the officers on the bridge. She explained what had happened in a few words.

Fay moved to her side. He concernedly studied the faces of the police offi-

cers who streamed aboard the sloop from their cutters. Rake pointed toward the Long Island shore.

"The men escaped over there," he announced boldly. "They killed 'Olgate and got away in the fog."

A coast lieutenant shouted orders to his crew in a police launch. The fast boat sheered from the Glorianna and made toward Oyster Bay. Another followed, after being wig-wagged.

"They make more noise than a brass band," said Rake to Fay. "Do they think Big Scar is asleep?"

"Big Scar and the remainder of his mob have scattered by this time. That's the end of them. They'll not make another attempt to capture the gold."

Rake glanced at the yacht's holystoned deck. He blinked at a scarlet stain.

An hour later the racing yacht was back at her anchorage near City Island. Her tender brought aboard her racing crew. They went to work repairing the damage done in the fight. Bullet holes were patched in the canvas. The deck was swabbed down. Everything was made shipshape.

Fay and Rake climbed up a dangling ladder. The yacht's doctor sewed the wound in the cracksman's shoulder. "Close thing that," he said after he had finished stitching. "It might have severed an artery."

"Where was Holgate shot?"

"Right through the heart. A bull's-eye—I'd say."

The day passed with endless investigations and interrogations. Rake stood guard at the door of the cabin. He kept away all police officers and detectives. He persuaded Fay to go to bed.

"Keep your 'ead covered," he suggested. "There's more bloomin' row over one shootin' than I ever saw before. One would think we were guilty of everything. 'Ere comes another launch full of coroners and bobbies."

"Where is Elaine?"

"Yellow Top is keepin' to 'er cabin. She's got a couple of grand dames with 'er. They came in a mahogany cruiser what's lying 'longside—by the landing stage."

"Any signs of Big Scar and his mob of yeggs?"

"None at all! I 'erd a bo's'ain say 'e did a good job when 'e croaked 'Olgate. Nobody 'ad any bloomin' use for the old cove."

"He paid for the murder of Frisbee. I suppose the races will be postponed until he is buried?"

"Nobody seems to know. The Glorianna went out for a trial spin."

Rake's voice changed from a whisper to a loud protest.

"Keep away from 'ere!" he exclaimed in the doorway. "There's a very sick man in 'ere. 'E's my master. Go see the doctor."

"Who was that?" asked Fay from his bed.

"A blym tin-star marshal! The deck is full of them. They're lookin' for clues."

Fay dressed, lighted a cigarette, and sat down on a divan. He stared at the bright sunlight which streamed through an open porthole. It formed a yellow streak across the cabin deck.

"Rake," he mused, "the question of the gold has been settled—unsatisfactorily for us. We know where it is located, yet it is as far away as the stars. Rather odd that we never thought of the Glorianna's bulb keel. It was the only place we didn't think of."

"I don't get that keel thing."

"It's simple. Holgate was an inventor. He knew that if he used an extremely heavy metal for a keel, he would make the yacht sail faster. Consider using cast-iron instead of lead. A cast-iron keel would offer considerable resistance to the water. A lead keel would offer less resistance. A keel of gold, weight for weight, occupies less space or cross-section than iron or lead. Therefore it offers less resistance to the water. The

game of yacht racing to-day has come down to taking care of the fine points. Holgate's solid gold keel made the Glorianna six or seven minutes faster than the Boston contender. It will help beat Sir Roderick's yacht in the Cup Races."

"But is it fair?"

"Certainly! It was never thought of before—that's all."

"Then the bullion Big Scar followed from the Subtreasury was put in the keel."

"Exactly. There are probably four or five small hand-holes in the steel casing of the bulb. The ingots were packed in place, plates were fastened by screws over the holes, and the entire keel made water-tight."

"It's an expensive way!"

"Not at all. The gold can be used again. All Holgate lost was the interest on the value of the bullion. The Subtreasury will buy it back."

It was the following day when Elaine came aft to the cabin. Her uncle's funeral was set for the next afternoon. She wore black mourning. Her eyes showed no trace of weeping.

"It couldn't be avoided," she said, glancing from Fay to Rake. "You did your parts, saved the yacht from being scuttled. Uncle died trying to retain the only sloop capable of defending the America's Cup."

"It lessens his crime," suggested Fay.

Elaine looked at the curtains which covered the cabin door.

"I want to speak to you about that unfortunate affair," she whispered. "The secret is locked with us three, now that uncle is dead. It should go no further."

"It never will!" exclaimed Fay. "Rake and I don't want anything for our silence. We've decided to play fair with you."

"Mr. Frisbee," said Elaine, "designed the Glorianna for uncle. He was well paid. He protested against the change in the keel which uncle wanted. There was an argument between the builders and Mr. Frisbee. They decided that if gold was packed in the bulb of the keel instead of lead, there would be at least a half-knot added to the Glorianna's speed. Mr. Frisbee said the thing was unsportsmanlike, that it had never been done, that it was an unfair advantage over all other yachts."

Elaine paused and looked at Fay.

"I don't see why it was unfair," said the cracksman.

"Neither do I. The racing rules allow you to use any metal on the keel. Lead isn't specified, but it is generally used. Uncle took advantage of the fact that he was enormously wealthy. He ordered the builders to fill the hollow keel with bullion. Mr. Frisbee came west and had an argument with uncle. He threatened to tell the racing authorities. He told uncle he would notify the newspapers. Uncle struck Mr. Frisbee. They fought like two cave men, up and down our suite at the Orangelands hotel. Then uncle picked up a chair, swung it over his head and crushed Mr. Frisbee's skull. It was done very quickly. I must have fainted. When I regained consciousness uncle had the doors locked and was pacing the floor."

"Did anybody in the hotel hear the noise?" asked Fay.

"A bell boy knocked. Uncle sent him away. Said it was nothing. I never saw a man so cool."

"This affair of the keel of gold," said Fay, "turned out differently than I expected. You couldn't have told me a week or so ago that I would pass up ten million dollars and give it back to the owner. In that way I have seen a light. Now, what can Rake and I do—but go to Europe and look for the main chance?"

"You could stay in the States and go to work!"

"At what?"

"Most anything. You have talent. I'll give you both enough money to start in business."

Fay glided over the deck and stared out through a porthole. He turned suddenly.

"We had better get away from this country," he said. "You fix matters with that police chief you know. Some day we'll come back. Some day we may reform. But I do hate to quit the game before I make one big touch. I've been trying to land something big for ten years. I'm no nearer it now than I was at the beginning."

"'Ow about a little pocket money?" asked Rake ruefully.

"You both can have—"

Elaine studied Fay's keen features. "How much do you want?" she asked.

"Nothing!"

Elaine flushed, looked at Fay, and left the cabin.

"You let 'er off bloomin' cheap," said Rake as the curtains fell behind the girl.

"Rake?"

"Yes, Chester."

"Do you know why I set the figure at nothing?"

"No, Chester."

"Because I would rather have Elaine's friendship and good will than all the money in the world."

CHAPTER XVIII

THE END

EVENTS moved in logical succession during the days that Fay and Rake waited on the Standart.

Holgate, according to the newspapers brought out to the yacht, had a splendid funeral.

Elaine gave out an interview in which she stated that the death of her uncle would in no way interfere with the races for the America's Cup. Sir Roderick, with British sportsmanship, offered to put the matter over for a year.

This offer was declined. The Glorianna was towed through Hell Gate and given a final tryout. Fay and Rake, from the deck of the Standart, noted her speed. It was a thing to marvel at in the day of steam and electricity.

"She'll win by a mile," said Fay.

"Blym no!" declared Rake. "Gold keel and all—the English yacht is the faster."

The first race—a beat to windward, a short leg across the wind, and an almost perfect run to the finishing line—was close and exciting. The Glorianna stood up like a steeple. The great weight of bullion far down on her fin keel decided matters, with little margin to spare. Her announced time over the British challenger was two minutes and fifteen seconds. Her corrected time was less than a minute.

Two days later the tables were turned when the English sloop crossed the line a winner by over twenty minutes. The Glorianna had lost a club-topsail. She staggered home gamely.

"What did I tell you," said Rake, dancing up and down the Standart's deck.

Elaine leaned over the bridge.

"An accident!" she called to Fay.

The third race went to the Glorianna. The last and deciding race took place in a full gale. The Standart rocked and tossed. The excursion boats ran for the shelter of the Narrows. Only the Commodore's ship remained near the finishing line.

Through the smother of wind-driven mist came the Glorianna—like smoke from a cannon. She lifted over the billows. She lunged for the line. Behind her loomed the black shape of the British sloop—outsailed and outdistanced.

Fay clapped Rake on the back.

"America wins!" he shouted.

"It was the bloody keel of gold that did it, Chester."

"That and two hundred years of rearing seamen, Rake. The racing skipper of the Glorianna hung out more canvas than I ever saw flying in a gale."

"'E knew she'd stand hup with all that swag in 'er keel."

Fay climbed to the bridge and stood at Elaine's side. She was writing a wireless message on a wet chart-rack.

"Yankee pluck conquers," said Fay when she had finished.

"It was mighty white of you to save that gold," she said. "I'm going to have it taken from the keel as soon as the Glorianna reaches City Island."

"It'll be well guarded, won't it?"

"Tremendously well-guarded!"

"There're a few crooks left in this world."

"But they do such uninteresting things. I don't believe many of them have imagination."

Fay talked with the girl for an hour, then went aft. He found Rake, seasick and praying for a landlocked harbor.

"We're going back to City Island," he told the cockney. "From there you and I sail for Europe."

"I don't think I'll live that long, Chester."

"Brace up! This isn't even Western Ocean weather."

The Standart lead the Commodore's boat and the Glorianna through the Narrows. New York was passed at night. City Island, with its lights, showed finally. The anchor chain rattled through the yacht's hawse. A cradle-winch squeaked on shore. The Glorianna went up the ways. She was safely tucked in a well-guarded shipyard.

Next morning Elaine came into Fay's cabin.

"I've come to say good-bye," she declared. "I've given orders to the captain to take you anywhere you want to go. You and Rake have *carte blanche* in your landfall. Why not make it Liverpool or Southampton?"

"We had better sail or steam with sealed orders," said Fay. "We're still wanted, you know."

"'Ow about that pocket change?" asked Rake.

Fay glared at Rake, and placed his hands behind his back.

Elaine saw the action, glided over the cabin deck, turned at the curtains, flashed Fay a burning glance and said softly:

"I'm not going to say good-bye to you. I hope to hear some day that you have changed your ways and made good."

Fay went into his cabin and lay across the bed. He heard, at noon, the first throbbing of the Standart's engines. He went on deck. Rake, correctly clad in white duck trousers and a blue pea-jacket borrowed from a mate, lay sprawled across the floor of the chart house.

"Gol blym!" he exclaimed, glancing up. "I can't find hit on the map."

"Can't find what?" asked Fay.

"The place where we're going. I told the skipper to 'ead for it. It ain't on this map."

"What place?"

"Iceland."

"Why Iceland?"

"Because I've been lookin' through the books. I found an encyclopedia. It said Iceland has no jails. We're going there!"

Fay crammed his hands in his pockets and left the chart room. He moved to the skipper's side.

"What course are you going to take from Block Island?"

"Ninety, true!"

"Did my valet mention Iceland?"

"He did!"

"Just change that course a few degrees. Make for the Azores. I'd heard that they are wonderful islands—quite out of the beaten track of detectives!"

THE END

The Story of THE BLACK CAT

By THE EDITOR

WENTY-FIVE years ago this month the first number of THE BLACK CAT, "A Monthly Magazine of Original Short Stories," made its appearance on the newsstands throughout the country. It was a thin, odd looking book, containing only forty-nine pages of reading matter; but modest as its appearance was, it was the consummation of an idea that had been foremost in the publisher's mind for nearly ten years.

Not all of the facts of the story are available. The writer doesn't know for instance, why the man who came to Boston with an idea in a tin box selected THE BLACK CAT as the name of the new magazine which was soon to become known as "The Cat That Captured the Country." It has been stated, but not authoritatively, that the title was taken from Edgar Allan Poe's story, "The Black Cat." Or possibly its name was suggested by the French publication *Le Chat Noir.*

Herman D. Umbstaetter, the founder and for more than sixteen years the publisher of THE BLACK CAT, was born at Parma, Ohio, February 26, 1851, the son of Charles and Helen Hege Umbstaetter. As a young man he went to Cleveland, where he engaged in newspaper work, and from there graduated to a position as the director of the advertising department of the Charles A. Vogeler Company of Baltimore, at that time one of the largest patent-medicine concerns in the world. This position, in which at the age of twenty-three he received a salary of $10,000, he occupied for fourteen years, and through his original, ingenious and energetic methods he made the product of that house world famous. From an insignificant beginning he pushed this enterprise to a point where he was expending hundreds of thousands of dollars in advertising St. Jacob's Oil in the press of America, Australia, India and Europe. Traveling in the interests of the company he went as far as Australia, and in England it was he who first succeeded in persuading the publishers of PUNCH to accept full-page advertisements exploiting an American product.

It was at this time that Joseph Pulitzer, founder and publisher of the NEW YORK WORLD, in a note of introduction to George Augustus Sala of the LONDON TELEGRAPH, wrote: "Mr. Umbstaetter is undoubtedly the greatest advertising genius in this or any other country."

Confirming this, and the more remarkable because its author did not know that Mr. Umbstaetter was the genius behind St. Jacob's Oil, is the following extract from an article on advertising by Harry Leon Wilson, published in the SATURDAY EVENING POST, July 26th, 1919: "Reluctantly do I leave that expanding life between 1865 and the current year. Would that I had by me the complete works of that anonymous word artist who lauded St. Jacob's Oil in words of acute, slim beauty, like unto a Chippendale table's. That man knew how to say it in short words! I mourn his passing. After earnest effort I can recall no abler writer of prose. He had the virtues of Ruskin and Pater and the vices of neither."

In fourteen years Mr. Umbstaetter be-

came a rich man; but the accumulated wealth of that fourteen years was swept away by an unfortunate business connection. Mr. Umbstaetter was in London. He returned to the United States, put the remnant of his property under the hammer, stored the curios and mementoes that he had gathered in all quarters of the globe, and went to California to recoup his lost health in outdoor life. It was there that he found not only his health, but his future wife, a clever young artist named Nelly Littlehale, whom he married in 1893 and whose initials "N. L. U." later appeared as the signature to THE BLACK CAT cover designs.

In 1886, before the advent of the ten-cent magazines and when most magazines sold for thirty-five cents, Mr. Umbstaetter made his first attempt to establish THE BLACK CAT. He visited Boston and proposed to a number of New England business men, the establishment there of a ten-cent magazine of original fiction that should mark a new departure, not only in price, but in matter and methods as well. Although his reputation as an organizer had preceded him, the proposal met with no favor—the chief objection urged being the objection that the man with a really new idea usually encounters. "If a market existed for such a periodical why hadn't other publishers seized the opportunity? If a really good magazine could profitably be produced and sold in large editions at ten cents, why did other publishers charge thirty-five cents? If the serial story was, as a matter of fact, giving the large majority of the reading public a pain in the side, why didn't the publishers and authors cut it short? If there really were men and women—other than those whose names had become household words—who could tell in good English, clever, fascinating stories, why didn't we hear of them? And if many intelligent people really read a story, not with a view to ascertaining whether its author was a perfect lady or a dyspeptic gentleman, but read it because of its merits as a story—if all this was true, well what was the matter with the thirty-five cent magazines anyway? Their editors surely received hundreds of clever stories. What did they do with them?"

The result was that Mr. Umbstaetter put off the project to a time when he should be able, without outside capital, to carry it into effect. When finally he had gathered enough for a start, he went to the Riverside Press and ordered 100,000 lithographed covers for his first edition. Mifflin, one of the owners of that publishing and printing firm, learned of this, called on him, and said: "What in the world do you want 100,000 copies for?" It was a mystery to him, and it was equally a mystery in the minds of others. The American News Company took him aside, and with fatherly advice suggested an edition of 10,000. People might buy that many to satisfy their curiosity, but the thing couldn't last. Several ten-cent fiction magazines had been started while Mr. Umbstaetter had been accumulating a stake; the all-fiction field seemed to be crowded But Mr. Umbstaetter had decided to go a step further than the publishers who had anticipated him with their ten-cent magazines; he determined to issue his magazine for five cents, and he stuck to his original order of 100,000 copies for the first edition.

Sage advertisers insisted that a monthly magazine of original short stories, at five cents, would simply appeal to five-cent people, but the very five-cent people who bought the first number kept right on satisfying their curiosity month after month; thousands sent in subscriptions and news companies all over the country sent in standing orders. By publishing stories that were judged solely on their merits, without regard for the names or reputations of the writers, by paying not according to length but according to strength, by making each number of THE BLACK CAT complete in itself so that the reader wouldn't have to wait six months

or a year to find out whether the hero was accepted or died cured—by doing these things, Mr. Umbstaetter succeeded in publishing a magazine that appealed alike to the capable writer and the discriminating reader.

Quality in fiction was the thing desired. As the NEW YORK PRESS said: What was wanted was not a tub of water, however pure, with three drops of frangipanni, but the concentrated essence of the story teller's art.

The first number, published at 144 High Street, Boston, contained seven stories. Three of the stories were by Mr. Umbstaetter himself. "The Unturned Trump" was signed Barnes MacGregger; "Her Hoodoo" appeared over the signature Harold Kinsabby; and "The Red Hot Dollar" which later provided a title for a collection of stories by Mr. Umbstaetter was published over his own name. Another story was "The Secret of the White Castle" by Julia Magruder, now an occasional contributor of verse to the magazines. Still another contributor was Charles Edward Barnes, whose story, "In a Tiger Trap," was pirated by an English paper and published under the title "Iali, Which Means Forgiven." An amusing fact in this connection is that the story was copied from the English journal and hailed as one of the best stories of the day by several American newspapers whose editors had failed to appreciate its literary value when it appeared in THE BLACK CAT. As the result of this violation of the copyright law, Mr. Umbstaetter succeeded in collecting damages from several American publishers.

It is worth remarking that when this first number of THE BLACK CAT appeared, it contained neither promise nor prospectus. The time-honored list of distinguished contributors was not in evidence; the customary prophecy, even, that a long-felt want was about to be filled, found no place in its pages. The magazine was from the very outset offered solely on its merits.

Mr. Umbstaetter believed that every intelligent man and woman had at least one story worth telling, for no life is without some unusual experience, adventure or spice of romance; but he believed that very few of the people who really had something good to tell ever found the opportunity to tell it. The ironclad partiality of publishers for great names and literary reputations made it exceedingly difficult for unknown writers. Poor stories by well-known writers were bought and publicly praised even before they were written, while clever stories by unknown writers went begging for years after they were written. He set out to get the best stories obtainable without regard for the name, reputation or previous condition of servitude of the writer, and in his pursuit of story material advertised himself as the one publisher with whom merit alone counted. To the unknown writers he said: "To achieve success you need not cross the sea for a plot; need not step over the threshold of home to find material replete with human interest; need not journey beyond the portals of your own fancy for a story which, if well told, will charm the reading world. Select the subject with which you are familiar. A better story can be told about Mary Ann than has yet been told about Queen Anne. There are men and women without number who can tell the right kind of story who have been unable to get a hearing. To all these THE BLACK CAT gives an opportunity."

To reach the numberless unknown men and women who had the impulse to write but lacked the courage to offer their works to hide-bound publishers, Mr. Umbstaetter hit upon the plan of conducting a series of prize contests. Between November 1896 and October 1904 he awarded prizes amounting to more than $32,000. These prizes ranged from $100 to $2,100 and from an Oliver typewriter to a tour of the world. The $2,100 prize went to Clifton Carlisle Osborn for his story entitled "A Few Bars in the

Key of G," published in October 1904. This story is said to have been fished out of the rejection basket by Mr. Umbstaetter after it had been read by his staff readers and marked "unavailable." It was a story that, more than any other, made an impression on BLACK CAT readers, and it is often spoken of to-day whenever writers foregather and indulge in reminiscence. Only yesterday the writer and another contributor to THE BLACK CAT put their legs under a table just off New York's Peacock Alley and talked shop. Shop talk and wine make life worth while living, and so do shop talk and ice cream. THE BLACK CAT contributor has just sold a novelette to THE BLACK CAT and was in the mellow mood of reminiscence, and although he hadn't read "A Few Bars in the Key of G" in years he remembered it distinctly and even recalled the lines from the great oratorio, "The Messiah":

"For onto us a child is born;
Unto us a son is given,"

the identical lines which were the inspiration for the story.

Other stories that were famous in their day and still linger in the memory are "The Mysterious Card" by Cleveland Moffett and "A Celestial Crime" by Charles Stuart Pratt. All writers are familiar with the former, which has ever been the more popular of the two, though the author did not win so big a prize as either Charles Stuart Pratt or H. J. W. Dam, the author of that other famous story "The Tax on Moustaches." It is generally agreed among writers that Cleveland Moffett spoiled his story by writing the sequel, "The Mysterious Card Unveiled."

An interesting sidelight on the contests was the experiment carried out by Charles Edward Barnes, who won a $500 prize in 1900 with his story, "Margaret Kelley's Wake." Barnes, at that time employed on the NEW YORK HERALD, was at dinner one day with three other well-known writers at the Metropolitan Club. Tarrying over the coffee, they discussed the vicissitudes and amenities of the literary profession. Said one: "Do you suppose there is an editor in the country who has the courage to accept a really first-rate story by an unknown author in preference to a third-rate story by a man of great name—Kipling, for instance?" A negative opinion was expressed, but Barnes, speaking from personal experience, affirmed that there was such an editor, and that neither name, prejudice, nor former dealings would influence the editor of THE BLACK CAT in judging stories entered in the prize-story competition, then open.

It was proposed that Barnes should prove his conviction by a most unusual test, by writing two stories of equal merit in the opinion of those present and submitting one of them in his own name, which was well known as that of a BLACK CAT contributor, and the other under a name entirely unknown, one in fact manufactured by transposing the letters of his own name.

This plan was carried out with the full knowledge of the three gentlemen, who accordingly watched the outcome with much interest. Both stories and letters of submittal were typewritten. One was signed with Barnes's own name with his home address, Flushing, L. I. The other bore the name S. C. Brean, and the address, 156 Fifth Avenue, New York.

The result was that the story submitted under the author's own name was rejected and the other was awarded the first prize of $500, the name of S. C. Brean standing at the head of the list of prize winners.

In the usual order of events, S. C. Brean was asked for proper credentials to satisfy the publishers as to the originality of the story, etc., and F. L. Blanchard, associate editor of FOURTH ESTATE, John Gilmer Speed, the writer, and C. S. Zimmerman, the publisher, of 156 Fifth Avenue, New York, one of whom was at the dinner party at which the experiment was

planned, vouched for the literary integrity of the author of the successful story.

The award was made in due time, the certified check covering the amount of the first prize being made out to S. C. Brean; whereupon, the recipient sent a communication to the publishers of THE BLACK CAT disclosing the fact that "S. C. Brean" was none other than Charles Edward Barnes, one of their contributors, and setting forth the reasons for disregarding a technical condition of the contest in not attaching the real name of the author to the story.

The gentlemen who first met and planned the test gathered at the same place, and went over the complete documents of the case, which fully and completely established the fact that there was at least one publication where no other consideration than pure merit entered into the judgment of the stories.

In an article entitled "A Square Deal for Writers," published in THE JOURNALIST just after the awarding of $12,500 in prizes in January, 1905, Stanley Johnson related his experiences investigating the methods employed by Mr. Umbstaetter in conducting a prize contest. Between July and December he paid many visits to Mr. Umbstaetter's home in Back Bay, where the latter personally read nearly eight thousand of the manuscripts submitted, and also to his office, where all the records were kept and where assistants in the regular employ of the magazine—and hence thoroughly familiar with its requirements—were also engaged in reading. Here is the method by which the result was obtained.

Every assistant received the imperative instruction, "If it is worth reading, pass it along." As a safeguard against the passing by of a good story, each assistant reader received, in addition to his salary, a cash reward for every story passed along to Mr. Umbstaetter and found worthy of a prize. And a further reward was paid to each second reader who passed along a manuscript marked unavailable by the first reader and finally found worthy of a prize.

Mr. Umbstaetter's judgment was final. He believed that, as founder and owner of a publication entirely outside of conventional lines, a publication held in high favor by intelligent, discriminating people, he was the one most keenly interested in its future, and therefore the best judge of what stories should appear in its pages. He believed in exercising what the world over is recognized as the buyer's right: that the man who pays the money is entitled to his choice. The enthusiasm with which Mr. Umbstaetter pursued his search for prize stories was not unlike that of the pearl hunter who follows the streams of Maine, opens 5,000 clams, eagerly hoping for a prize in each, and averages only one pearl in a thousand.

The February, 1902, number, which was devoted entirely to various ingenious explanations of the presence of a well bred young lady in a barber shop at midnight is an example of Mr. Umbstaetter's ingenuity in his search for the unusual and the original. Mr. Umbstaetter advertised the number in this manner:

In the February BLACK CAT
The Young Lady
In the Barber Shop
At Midnight!

The Plot

In the hope of saving the Sultan's life, there was given to a successful literary club in Louisville, Kentucky, the problem of writing a short story in which a well-bred young lady has to find herself, in a natural manner, in a barber shop at midnight.

In the Harem

"I will now," said Scheherazade II, "relate the story of the young and well-bred lady in a barber shop at midnight—"

But with these words the beautiful, accomplished Sultana, the modern rival of the illustrious story teller of the thousand and one nights, fell back upon her

cushions dead. Paralysis of the tongue and paresis, caused by overtaxing her inventive faculties, had come upon her.

The grief of the Sultan was only exceeded by his curiosity to know the outcome of the tale his favorite wife had barely begun, and he declared that the lady who could tell him the story should become the successor of her for whom he so deeply grieved; but no one could be found who knew the story of the well-bred lady in a barber shop at midnight. A deep melancholy seized the Sultan, and in spite of every effort of his court, the unfortunate ruler grew daily more despondent.

The Five Willing Maidens

It was then that there appeared at the palace gate one day, in tourist's garb, five young ladies from the United States, each more beautiful than the other and each asserting that she, and only she, knew the story of the well-bred young lady in the barber shop at midnight. They were at once welcomed to the palace, where they related to the Sultan the following named stories as told by five members of the literary club above mentioned:

A Hair-breadth 'Scape—by Margaret Steele Anderson.
The Pink Umbrella—by Evelyn Snead Barnett.
Force of Circumstance—by Mary L. Leonard.
The Golden Tresses—by Mrs. A. R. Martin.
Ladies' Night—by Alice Caldwell Hegan (Alice Hegan Rice).

Many writers now widely known are in greater or less degree indebted to Mr. Umbstaetter for the first recognition of their talents. Among them, most of them prize-winners in one or more of the contests, are Jack London, O. Henry, Rupert Hughes, Alice Hegan Rice, Harry Stilwell Edwards, Will N. Harben, Geraldine Bonner, Sewell Ford, Holman Day, Cleveland Moffett, Juliet Wilbor Tompkins, Ellis Parker Butler, Susan Glaspell, James Francis Dwyer, Michael White, William Hamilton Osborne, William J. Neidig, Frank X. Finnegan, Frank Lillie Pollock, Grace MacGowan Cooke, Bert Leston Taylor, Anna McClure Sholl, and Thomas L. Masson. Of these, James Francis Dwyer, Michael White and Don Mark Lemon, a writer of less prominence, were the most prolific writers of BLACK CAT stories.

The story of Jack London's success after the hardest struggle a writer ever made to win recognition and entrée to the magazines is more than a twice-told tale, as is the greater part of this article, but it will bear repeating. In "Martin Eden" London tells the story, and the magazine which he there refers to as the WHITE MOUSE is THE BLACK CAT. The facts as presented in fiction are almost identical to the story as told in an introduction by Jack London to Mr. Umbstaetter's book, "The Red Hot Dollar," and reprinted here:

"It is indeed a pleasure to write an introduction for a collection of tales by Mr. H. D. Umbstaetter. His stories are BLACK CAT stories, and by such designation is meant much. The field of THE BLACK CAT is unique, and a BLACK CAT story is a story apart from all other short stories. While Mr. Umbstaetter may not have originated such a type of story, he made such a type possible, and made many a writer possible. I know he made me possible. He saved my literary life, if not my literal life. And I think he was guilty of this second crime, too.

"For months, without the smallest particle of experience, I had been attempting to write something marketable. Everything I possessed was in pawn, and I did not have enough to eat. I was sick, mentally and physically, from lack of nourishment. I had once read in a Sunday supplement that the minimum rate paid by the magazines was ten dollars a thousand words. But during all the months devoted to storming the magazine

field, I had received back only manuscripts. Still I implicitly believed what I had read in the Sunday supplements.

"As I say, I was at the end of my tether, beaten out, starved, ready to go back to coal-shoveling or ahead to suicide. Being very sick in mind and body, the chance was in favor of my self-destruction. And then, one morning, I received a short, thin letter from a magazine. This magazine had a national reputation. It had been founded by Bret Harte. It sold for twenty-five cents a copy. It held a four-thousand-word story of mine, "To the Man on the Trail." I was modest. As I tore the envelope across the end, I expected to find a check for no more than forty dollars. Instead, I was coldly informed (by the Assistant Sub-scissors, I imagine), that my story was "available" and that on publication I would be paid for it the sum of five dollars.

"The end was in sight. The Sunday supplement had lied. I was finished—finished as only a very young, very sick, and very hungry young man could be. I planned—I was too miserable to plan anything save that I would never write again. And then, that same day, the mail brought a short, thin letter from Mr. Umbstaetter of THE BLACK CAT. He told me that the four-thousand-word story submitted to him was more lengthy than strengthy, but that if I would give permission to cut it in half, he would immediately send me a check for forty dollars.

"Give permission! It was the equivalent to twenty dollars per thousand, or double the minimum rate. Give permission! I told Mr. Umbstaetter that he could cut it down two halves if he'd only send the money along. He did, by return mail. And that is just precisely how and why I stayed by the writing game. Literally, and literarily, I was saved by THE BLACK CAT short story.

"To many a writer with a national reputation, THE BLACK CAT has been the stepping stone. The marvelous, the unthinkable thing Mr. Umbstaetter did, was to judge a story on its merits and to *pay for it on its merits.* Also, and only a hungry writer can appreciate it, he paid immediately on acceptance.

"Of the stories in this volume, let them speak for themselves. They are true BLACK CAT stories. Personally, I care far more for men than for the best stories ever hatched. Wherefore, this introduction has been devoted to Mr. Umbstaetter, the Man."

For more than sixteen years Mr. Umbstaetter put all his energy into the publishing of a magazine which, begun as a labor of love, became increasingly so as the cost of production increased and competition became keener. His enthusiasm for the task was unbounded and he was conscientious and painstaking in everything which he did. He was a master of detail always, in and out of business life, and a man of great faith in his sense of right and of the power within him.

He was a born epicurean, loving always the ordering and serving of the perfect meal, and no one was more hospitable. He was also an ardent fisherman, and no sketch of him could be complete, quite, without mention of his tenderness toward all animals—and his devotion of years to the big, beautiful black cat, Elizabeth Jane, which Captain Michael White mentions in another article as the magazine's mascot.

Mr. Umbstaetter loved the outdoors, and most of the summers of his later life were spent in the enthusiastic reconstruction of an abandoned farm at Center Lovell, Maine. It was here that he died November 26, 1913.

In the spring of 1912, Mr. Samuel E. Cassino, of Salem, Mass., publisher of LITTLE FOLKS MAGAZINE, bought THE BLACK CAT from Mr. Umbstaetter, and moved the publication office from Boston to Salem. Miss Theresa E. Dyer, who for many years had been Mr. Umbstaetter's chief assistant, went to Salem as

editor. Miss Dyer shortly resigned the editorship, and it was about this time that the circulation manager of the METROPOLITAN MAGAZINE, a man known to the newsdealers all over the country as Front-row Kelly, because of his aggressiveness in getting his magazine a prominent position on the newsstands, was bitten by the publishing bug and decided to buy THE BLACK CAT. Mr. Kelly went so far with the idea as to take over the management of the magazine, but the publishers of the METROPOLITAN objected to his serving two masters, and Mr. Kelly decided that a lucrative position was too good to give up in exchange for the burdens and responsibilities of the publisher. He did, however, continue for a time to serve in the capacity of editor, and it was during this period that the writer of this chapter of history became connected with the magazine as a reader. He weeded out the slush and sent the possibles on to Mr. Kelly in New York, and the latter made the final selections and wrote the blurbs, or teasers, which at that time were run at the beginning of each story.

In the summer of 1915 Mr. Cassino sold the magazine to his son, Herman E. Cassino, and the September issue that year was the first under the new management. Mr. Cassino, like Mr. Umbstaetter, was his own editor, and as he didn't see the necessity of having a first reader, the first reader was fired. But the details of management were so many and took so much of his time that the manuscripts accumulated faster than he could dispose of them, and he was obliged to hire the first reader back again, and in June of the following year made him the editor of the magazine.

The present publishers of THE BLACK CAT acquired the magazine in October of last year.

A mistaken idea which has prevailed in the minds of readers and writers, in spite of repeated explanations, since the publication of the first number of THE BLACK CAT, is that the magazine has always sought for and made a specialty of featuring stories of the weird, gruesome or morbid type. In announcing the conditions of the prize contests he conducted, Mr. Umbstaetter always clearly defined his position on this point. He was ever searching for the unusual and unique, and instead of advertising for stories that were weird and gruesome, as he is reported to have done, he on the contrary warned against the submission of stories of this type. "While writers may choose their own themes," he said, "we especially desire stories, in the handling of which the morbid, unnatural and unpleasant are avoided rather than emphasized." He published many stories that were decidedly shivery, but he did not encourage the ghost story, because the ghost story, skillfully done, is a rare thing; and many writers who persisted in submitting stories that were repellant, because they could not conceive or achieve the unusual in anything but a repellant story, received their manuscripts back in the mail, and wondered why.

The present publishers take the same attitude, as stated in the conditions of both the short-story and novelette contests.

THE BLACK CAT of Mr. Umbstaetter's day was a vision fulfilled. Mr. Umbstaetter recognized the necessity and importance of giving the young, unknown writer a chance. Conditions have changed since that time; the editors of to-day look on both sides of the street and in all the alleys for the new writer with the fresh viewpoint and the courage to keep eternally plugging at his writing until he masters the technique of it. Their vision extends beyond the limits of any publication center. With the changed conditions, the policy of THE BLACK CAT has changed. Its editors are still on the lookout for the unknown writer; and stories are still judged strictly on their merits without regard for the names or reputations of the authors. But competition is

keen; good stories are hard to find; it is impossible to discover fifteen or twenty budding geniuses each month, and folly to depend upon the stories of new writers to fill the pages of THE BLACK CAT, especially in its new, enlarged form. Likewise it is folly to expect that a writer of established reputation will be content always to have his work paid for on the basis of merit alone and on an equal footing with the unknown writer.

Unthinking critics write disparagingly of the "big name fettish"; and young writers, reading such rubbish, are the more readily convinced that only the big writers can get into the magazines. They do not stop to think that the man who has arrived, in nine cases out of ten, has put in years of hard, discouraging work, that he had to gain a foothold, and that he was willing to serve an apprenticeship which the young writer, also in nine cases out of ten, thinks he can dodge. It is senseless to say that this successful writer's name is worth nothing. His name on the cover of a magazine is to a certain extent a guarantee that the magazine is worth buying. It is not guarantee that every story of his is a first-rate story; it is no guarantee that each story of his is better than the last; but it is a guarantee of good workmanship the greater part of the time. He has his following. His name on the cover may sell the magazine to the buyer who approaches the newsstand with an open mind, who, seeing that name, remembers that he has read a good story by the same writer in a previous issue. The buyer knows that the magazine is worth taking a chance on, and there is pleasure in his anticipation of reading the story by that writer who has proved his worth by past performance. In the same issue of the magazine there may be a story by an unknown writer. His story may be the story of the year, but his name means absolutely nothing until that fact has been proved. On the cover it means nothing to the man who runs his eye down the list looking for a favorite. It conveys nothing to that buyer unless the editor has written a blurb about the great, new find, and even then Mr. Buyer, who has read countless similar blurbs, is likely to remain unconvinced.

Mr. Umbstaetter was sincere when he said that a story should be judged solely on its merits without regard for the name or reputation of a writer; we are sincere in saying that we do judge stories in just that way and expect to go on doing so. But we are also sincere in our belief that we must depend upon writers of established reputation to provide the bulk of the material we publish.

CONTRIBUTING TO THE BLACK CAT

By MICHAEL WHITE

I SHOULD, of course, like to say that the very first story I ever wrote I sent to the BLACK CAT, and, budding genius that I was, the editors grabbed it and me into their joyful arms. But the editors know otherwise, so the truth may as well out that I contributed freely for awhile without harvesting anything more satisfactory than those little manuscript rejection slips which they simply will not cash at the bank. During this period the only editorial comment made on my offerings was a few penciled lines on one of the slips calling my attention to the fact that I had used the name of the Serbian royal family attached to a villain in a story with a Balkan setting. I make a point of this here because later, when I landed in the BLACK CAT with both feet, I learned that any statement of fact in a story went under almost microscopical examination, that facts were weighed and estimated at pretty close to their real value apart from stirring up a lively fiction interest. Another, and personally critical instance of this, will be given further along in these pages.

Finally there came one morning, as a pleasant breakfast surprise, the aspired for letter of acceptance. I use the term aspired for because in those days the BLACK CAT stood by itself as a magazine out for "stories that were stories," and went in strong for originality of plot irrespective of the name or fame of a particular writer. By that policy it had literally "captured the country." But for the moment I was inclined to rub my chin a bit pensively, for in the terms of acceptance there was a demand for the names of three responsible citizens who would vouch for it that I was also personally acceptable. That took some thinking, for while one might lay ones hands on half a dozen responsible citizens, it seemed best to be certain that there did not hang over with either of the three selected some trifling financial obligation which had somehow or other inadvertently escaped the literary memory. In such cases responsible citizens, perhaps over impressed with their responsibility, are apt to be mighty exact in stating just thus and so, like giving evidence at a manslaughter trial, as it were. Evidently, however, my three responsible citizens reported on me favorably, for I presently received a request for more stories. Thereafter, for two and a half years, I became one of the regular BLACK CAT writers. In the words of Mr. Herman Umbstaetter, the proprietor, I contributed in that time to his magazine "more stories than any other single writer."

The Founder and Proprietor of the BLACK CAT

Shortly after my first acceptance another followed and I received an invitation to visit Mr. Umbstaetter in Boston. I found that this was Mr. Umbstaetter's usual practice, especially in the case of writers who promised to become regular contributors. I subsequently gathered that Mr. Umbstaetter liked to know his writers personally, and to keep in close touch with them through periodical

meetings at which he discussed his plans and exchanged ideas. I understood he had even brought one such writer, and prize winner, all the way from California at the expense of the BLACK CAT; but so delighted with Boston was this rising literary star out of the Golden West that he straightway proceeded to spend his prize money on a round of high pleasure, and when that was over didn't feel inclined to write any more stories. He just wanted to hang around good old Boston, so that eventually it was thought advisable to present him with transportation back to California. I believe he was never heard from again.

Mr. Umbstaetter was a big man physically and mentally. Here I should add that he was also as big in his hospitality and kindness. Once his interest or confidence was won no amount of trouble was too much in helping out a writer. He seemed to delight hugely in wrestling with the problem of a story under discussion. To the publishing business he brought the training and experience of years as an advertising man, which business had taken him to continents as far apart as Europe and Australia. Hence his vision embraced a wide sweed of the earth's surface, and enabled him to grasp with sure judgment the value of a fresh touch, a new theme, disclosed in some story which came to his hands from afar. A new star did not get very far above the horizon before Mr. Umbstaetter saw him, as the list of the BLACK CAT writers bears ample testimony. Further, since in his business life he had been quick to employ novel methods, the contributor invited to become one of the BLACK CAT family, as it were, found the barriers down against following any two by two rule of literary convention. It was always good stories he wanted, and provided it was a good story it mattered less to him whether the scene of it was laid in New York, San Francisco, on the ocean or under it, anywhere on the old earth or in the Moon. This policy, if it can be called one, seemed to puzzle a good many BLACK CAT aspirants, if the number of letters which came to him seeking enlightenment was a criterion.

The Kind of Stories Not Wanted

When a contributor visited Mr. Umbstaetter, either in Boston or at his country home in Center Lovell, Maine, at the foot of the White Mountains, an invitation was usually extended to assist him in reading story manuscripts, for it was his believe that there was no better way to get an idea of his needs than to grasp precisely by this method what he did not want. It was after all a rather negative tuition, for, as he explained, it was impossible for him to lay down a flat rule defining exactly the kind of story he wanted, because everything depended upon the story itself. He amplified this upon one occasion when he turned over to me a letter begging particulars about BLACK CAT stories.

"Now here we have it again," he said. "My answer to that will be that we have no prejudices against any kind of story, for the simple reason that we can never tell beforehand but that a prize story may come out of an unappealing subject." He went on to illustrate the point by stating that while generally speaking a hospital story would be unlikely to appeal to him, yet the possibility remained that someone would at some time write such a corking good hospital story that he would kick himself everlastingly afterward if he let it slip through his hands. A good many writers, he added, seemed to think that to drag a black cat by the tail into a story would make it a sure winner with him, whereas he had been so surfeited with cat stories that he was tempted to print a notice cutting them out entirely, were it not that a great cat story might come along. "So that's just how it is," he concluded with an expressive gesture of his hand.

But in speaking of cats it should not

be overlooked that the BLACK CAT had a mascot in a prize black Persian, a silken-coated, soft-footed, mysterious animal, who seemed to know a whole lot about what was going on. Every year when the annual family migration from Boston to the Maine country was due, and the cat's private car, i. e., his traveling basket was brought out, he went and sat in it to be sure he was not left behind. But once at large in the fields his reputation for benevolence suffered somewhat, owing to the breaking out of his natural instincts in hunting down small game. Then he displayed all the craft and ferocity of the feline. Anyway he was worth the price of a No. 1 story, and though not stating it as a fact one might infer that he served as the model for many of Mrs. Umbstaetter's popular BLACK CAT illustrations.

On the subject of requesting a chance contributor to rewrite or change some part of a story, experience had impressed Mr. Umbstaetter with the belief that it was usually an effort fruitlessly expended, and often resulted in misunderstanding, if not worse feeling, on both sides.

"As a rule it's no use," he upon one occasion plunged into a characteristic metaphor. "It's like asking someone to go out and buy you half a dozen oranges. You repeat the direction. You emphasize the fact it's half a dozen oranges you want. Not apples, nor peaches, but oranges. You think you have made the point abundantly clear. You want oranges, and it is agreed that you want oranges. Then out goes Mr. Contributor. Pretty soon he is back all aglow with enthusiasm, and this is about what follows: 'Mr. Umbstaetter I—er—after I got to looking over the fruit stands I decided that after all it would be better not to buy oranges this morning, that you would like something else. So I have bought you some be-au-ti-ful lemons.' By Golly! that's it, that's exactly what happens with an altered story as a rule. Back comes a be-au-ti-ful lemon. And the strange thing about it is that Mr. Contributor appears to be painfully surprised when you point out, as gently as possible, that what you wanted was an orange."

The Story That Never Was Written

I had been associated with Mr. Umbstaetter for more than a year as a regular contributor before I discovered that he was an author, and had written many good stories himself. Some of the best of them are gathered in his volume "The Red Hot Dollar." But after all when the discovery was made I was less surprised on recollecting the fertility of his mind in story ideas. Some of these ideas, however, were in the nature of story pointers or starters, i. e., story mathematical problems in which, granted certain premises, you wrestled with the unknown development and windup. I especially remember one of these starters which had been apparently kept in stock, and though strongly appealing to Mr. Umbstaetter, neither he nor anyone else could work out to a satisfactory end. While a very liberal inducement was offered for the solution of this puzzle, I was given to understand that some of the BLACK CAT's best-known writers had enthusiastically tackled it and failed. Reckless of the going down to defeat with these professional lights I cheerfully took in hand what for lack of title might have been termed "The Tramps and the Rocks."

From the beginning, as sketched by Mr. Umbstaetter, leaving development and windup to be found, I gathered the impression that at some time and somewhere he had been considerably bothered by tramps. Hence inspiration for the idea. In brief the outline ran as follows:

A Mr. Brown of some place in New England, one inferred from the few touches of scenery, had come to near desperation with the persistent invasion

of his domain by assorted tramps. He had liberally sprinkled the place with no-trespass signs, and warnings about shotguns and fierce dogs, but all to no account. Every day one or more of the vagrant tribe were found wandering in his territory upon some pretext or other. At last Mr. Brown was confronted by an unusually brazen fellow advancing toward his porch, entirely ignoring the shouts and threats to beat it. The man carried a bundle, contents unknown. As he climbed on to the porch, Brown seized him by the shoulder and swung him around. Then with outstretched arm he swept the immediate landscape, dotted with huge boulders of rock.

"See those rocks?" Brown demanded of the tramp.

The surprised tramp surveyed the scene and nodded.

"Do you know what I have planted under those rocks?" sharply questioned Brown.

The tramp perforce admitted he had no idea.

"Well, I'll tell you," went on Brown impressively. "If you were to remove those rocks you would find under each one of them a tramp. But," he extended a hand pointing to the largest rock of all, "that one there is still vacant. I guessed you'd be along pretty soon, and so I reserved it for you. As sure as you stand here you go under that rock to-night."

It was right there that Mr. Umbstaetter stopped and turned over the idea or starter, leaving me in just about as much bewilderment as to what to do next, or what lead to follow, as the tramp. Personally I would like to say I worked out the story to a great finish, as easily as eating New England pie, but must admit it proved a rock pile for me in company with those who had tackled it previously. So far as I know it never was completed. At this present moment the thought occurs to me that it might have been worked out along symbolical lines, that the tramps were us fellows who went for that job, but anyway I want no more night floor pacing with yonder unfinished yarn. With another starter which led out of the vibrations of the upper stories of a well-known New York business building I was successful.

Running Down a Fact

I have alluded previously to the editorial care in establishing facts in BLACK CAT stories. The editorial policy was searching and strict in this respect, and I inferred that the turning down of a good story on an error of fact was not unusual when any alteration would have thrown the whole plot out of gear. Obviously if the hero left New York for Boston on the 6.31 P. M. train, and witnessed a murder in the latter city at half past five the same afternoon, he might just as well have stayed in New York so far as any bearing his action could have had upon the remainder of the story. While this may be an extreme instance, even contributors with established reputations have been known to be curiously careless with their facts. This leads to the hunting down of a fact which, for a time, seemed to put me down and out in a BLACK CAT story. In talking with Mr. Umbstaetter I had related the astonishingly romantic story of the Empress Nur Mahal of India. After thinking it over he said that while it would probably not appeal to the majority of his readers, yet there was a likely minority who would enjoy it, and anyway he was among that minority. It seemed to fit in with his policy of not being hidebound by any conventional story rule, and he sometimes printed an essay on the same ground. So I wrote the story and sent it in. After a while I received a letter from the editor calling my attention to the fact that one of the most important encyclopedias contradicted me in placing the Empress Nur Mahal as the wife of the Emperor Jehangir of India, and gave her as the wife of Haroun-al-Rashid, of Arabian

Nights fame. That put the lady back many centuries in point of time, and, if correct, punched a pretty big hole in my story of her. I was asked to explain. Instead of explaining I took a train for Boston. There the whole dispute was gone into. I protested that I was right and the encyclopedia wrong, though backed up by another of its kind of equal standing. That, of course, was all very well, but how about proof of which I had not a line at hand? My facts were gathered from ancient records not immediately available. The editor thought someone would be sure to discover the discrepancy in the two accounts and write in about it, and what was my unsupported word against the two great encyclopedias? At this crisis Mr. Umbstaetter came to my assistance. There was a foreign encyclopedia in the Boston Public Library, which was as strong on the accuracy of facts as he was himself. Would I consent to abide by its decision? I agreed, being still certain I was right. So to the Boston Public Library. However as we turned over the leaves of the volume I held my breath as we came to the one which would decide whether or not I knew my oriental history. And there Nur Mahal was as the wife of the Emperor Jehangir, as I had contended all along. Thereupon a letter went to one of the encyclopedias which had caused the trouble, pointing to their error of fact, and giving the authority which stamped it as such. In a few days back came a letter of suitable aknowledgment and apology.

Mr. Umbstaetter As a Story Teller

I have stated previously that Mr. Umbstaetter was a writer of many good stories, but he was an equally clever narrator of them. There was one story he told with twinkling eyes of inward relish, though it was a bit on himself. On one of his business trips to England he was invited to visit a prominent cloth manufacturer. On leaving, his host presented him with a piece of cloth sufficient to make two pairs of pants, a favor since that particular cloth of extra fine quality had been manufactured for the use of the family only, and was not put upon the market. With the cloth, Mr. Umbstaetter repaired to one of those aristocratic Regent Street tailors, who display on their windows the arms of about all the world's potentates, and who proceed to their work on a customer with an almost funereal solemnity. As the firm had executed orders for Mr. Umbstaetter previously, and the ground plan of his pants, i. e., the pattern of them clipped out of sheets of brown paper, hung upon the wall of the fitting-room among those of a bunch of princes and dukes, Mr. Umbstaetter merely left the cloth with instructions. After a while the pants were delivered, also the bill. At the bill Mr. Umbstaetter opened his eyes, for he was surprised to find that he was charged exactly the same price for the pants as if he had not supplied the cloth. He decided that the next time he happened that way he would drop in at the shop and have the bill straightened out. But when he did call, and stated his mission, the white-whiskered and frock-coated Chief of the General Tailoring Staff stared at Mr. Umbstaetter with unfeigned astonishment, then bowing with great deference protested there had been no mistake in the bill, simply because his firm never made mistakes. But Mr. Umbstaetter was just as positive there was one, and pointed out again that he had supplied the cloth, the value of which should have been deducted from the price of the pants. A glimmer of light presently came into the eyes of the C. G. T. S.

"But, my dear sir," he said, "evidently you don't quite understand. In fixing our prices we—er—consider the reputation of our house, the excellence of our fit and style as per suit or garment. We —ah—never charge for the—er—cloth. Consequently, you see, it is immaterial

to us whether or not you supplied the cloth for your—Ahem!—your trousers, my dear sir, your trousers."

"Now can you beat that," Mr. Umbstaetter chuckled. "It was surely wonderful cloth, and I never could wear out those—Ahem!"—he imitated the tailor —"those all fit and style trousers."

The BLACK CAT Atmosphere

Somehow one retains a very distinct impression of the BLACK CAT atmosphere as in some way differing from that of other magazine offices. In the first place it was pervaded by Mr. Umbstaetter's energetic personality, a stimulant to the best effort. Then again Mr. Umbstaetter succeeded in making his writers feel at home; his cordial grasp of the hand and geniality was not to be forgotten. In the office on Pearl Street, Boston, with its quaint old-fashioned high desks and stools, there was little or no formality maintained. A hearty welcome awaited the writer who had succeeded in landing a story, with perhaps an invitation to lunch at the Boston Yacht Club, of which Mr. Umbstaetter was a member, followed by a game of billiards. Then perhaps he would tell the story of the founding of the BLACK CAT, in the face of all manner of discouragement, and of the success which rewarded his perseverance.

THE MAPLEWOOD SPEED KING

By RALPH E. MOONEY

Entered in the BLACK CAT *Short Story Contest*

HE Maplewood Speed King was brought to light by the growing rubber industry. He appeared at the Day-Nite Tire Agency, along with such phenomena as tire jockeys and men who mounted four-inch casings over the three-inch ones on their flivvers and wondered why they didn't get twice as much mileage from the double thickness of rubber.

The Maplewood Speed King never worked at the Day-Nite Tire Agency. He was merely one of its permanent ornaments—or liabilities—as Art, the manager, sometimes said when they found him underfoot at a particularly trying time. Indeed, if outward appearances were any indication, the speed king never worked anywhere.

He came soon after the agency opened, arriving in a long, rakish, dubious-looking roadster affair with a soap box for a seat and with the steering wheel, after the fashion of the older cars, on the right. Uncurling his gangly, twenty-one-year-old body from this piratical craft, he entered the store and demanded a thirty-four by three and one-half, quick-detachable tire.

This size and description of casing is all but extinct. The manufacturers have stopped making it because it is too slender for a heavy car and too large in wheel diameter for a light one. So Art, the manager, was slightly surprised. He cast a quick, impatient glance toward the customer's machine to be certain that he had the size right. Not every automobilist is wise enough to know his own tires. In this case, the size was correct enough but, in spite of that, Art rubbed his eyes and stared again.

"What in the world have you got there?" he asked, startled.

The Maplewood Speed King smiled in gratified pleasure.

"That's some boat," he proclaimed. "It's an old Pope engine on a Biltrite chassis and I got the wheels off a wrecked Morris."

A chorus of laughter greeted this statement. Art, and an assembly of waiting tire changers, enjoyed it immensely.

"But, man," proclaimed the Speed King in heedless ecstasy, "she's got speed! Oh, boy, she's got speed! She's the fastest thing out my way!"

"Hm!" grunted Art, without committing himself. "Where do you live?"

"Maplewood!" said the Speed King, proudly.

There was another howl of delight. Frank and Boloni, both master tire changers, and hence privileged characters, were compelled to lean against each other to escape rolling on the floor. Every city has small appending suburbs: New York its Yonkers; Chicago its Oak Park; St. Louis its Maplewood. None of these communities are greatly respected by their neighbors, and Maplewood is deemed especially unimportant by St. Louisans. Consequently the Speed King's statement was particularly ridiculous to his hearers.

The Maplewood Speed King spent some two hours in the selection of a tire. This was more than remarkable, seeing that he was compelled to make his choice from three samples of the size, but he thumped and pounded them for what seemed an age and then examined them

inch by inch, inside and out, searching for possible defects. Finally, he chose one and signed the name of Thomas Morgan to the salesticket, a signature which occasioned no little surprise. The tire boys had already known him as the Maplewood Speed King for so long a time that it seemed odd to learn that he had a regular name in addition.

Once the tire was paid for and slung imposingly behind the soap box, Morgan breathed a relieved sigh and seated himself in the manager's rest chair, near the door. He remained there for another hour or more, conversing with all who came within reach or, when periods of silence were forced upon him, intently reading the morning newspaper.

In this way did the Maplewood Speed King come to the Day-Nite Agency. Afterward, his appearance was as regular as that of the sun. Toward noon he would appear, the "boat" running at a demure speed in thoughtful care of the other, less nimble, cars on the street. Thunderously racing his motor, he would come to a stop before the tire store. After more stretching, to indicate the relief afforded his speed-racked muscles, he would dismount and, with vast carelessness, would assume a seat and the morning paper. Thereafter, he would rest immobile until the smell of cooking from the flat upstairs would disturb his youthful spirit with restless longings.

Then he would arise and approach the dusty vehicle with a jaunty, confident air. The entire force of the store would immediately hasten to the front to watch him off, for his goings were always an event in the day's routine. When he had cranked the car, receiving the while much cheerful comment and advice from the tire boys, he would curl himself into the driver's seat. As he disengaged the clutch and reached for the gear lever, he would assume a tense, slightly terrified expression, indicating that he realized the dangers and responsibilities of operating such a powerful contrivance. Then he would race the motor three times, creating a mumbling confusion and finally would set his juggernaut going.

And so away, while the tire boys yelled weakly in the last throes of overpowering mirth. For, while Morgan tightened his cap about his brows and while the old-time motor roared until the air trembled, the queer car would sleepily lumber into the traffic, attain an estimated speed of twenty-five miles an hour and would finally disappear in the distance, maintaining the same steadfast gait. Nobody ever saw Morgan pass anything, even a flivver; nor did anyone ever discover dust in his wake, except that kicked up by the exhaust. The speed boat was a tortoise in hare's clothing.

Now, in due time, an odd thing happened to Morgan and it is the purpose of this writing to set it forth. The young man experienced a lesson of the soul, a vast psychological awakening. He lived through one of those tense periods of a life time that cause wrinkles to form upon the countenance and hasten the coming of gray hairs. It was long before all the facts came to light, but come to light they did, gradually and surely, until it is at last possible to put them all down in black and white and make inferences and deductions from them, if need be.

To begin with, it has been learned from Morgan's own lips, that upon a certain day, he met a girl. He found her at the top of the long hill just outside Maplewood. She was on foot and carrying a heavy bundle. Tom Morgan stopped beside her.

"Give y'a lift?" he asked, with careful politeness and respect, because, he says, he could see at once that she was a most extraordinary person in many ways.

"Sure! Thanks!" answered the extraordinary girl.

After some maneuvering she was installed beside him on the soap box, clasping the bundle in her arms. With grandiose languor, Morgan tilted the nose of

the car over the long slope and, as he tells it, gave her the gas, referring, of course, to the speed boat and not to the girl. The car gained a great momentum on the grade and made a magnificent entry into Maplewood. Soon the young lady's destination was at hand with not a word said between them because, we are to understand, of the terrific rush of air, which prohibited speaking.

When the girl climbed down, she turned about, facing him with wide eyes and flushed cheeks.

"Thank y' so much," she acknowledged, with an awed glance toward the now distant hill top. "Gee! You got a wonderful car! It goes so fast!"

Morgan's heart leaped and his personality grew sensibly larger. The sunshine turned rosy red. The world spun a little faster than usual.

"'S nothing!" he muttered. "'S nothing!"

She lingered, unable to move, Morgan believed. Certainly, he himself was unable to do so. He could barely urge himself to speak.

"Y' live here?" asked Morgan, breathlessly. "Y' live here?"

"Yes," she answered. "Yes, I live here."

She nodded toward the small frame cottage behind her.

"We just moved in," she explained.

Morgan gulped and ran his fingers back and forth about the wheel.

"Like to take y'out again sometime," he nodded, blushing. "Like to!"

"Thanks," said the girl. "Like to go!"

Morgan smiled in a dazzling way.

"I'll come 'round," he announced. "Good-bye!"

"Good-bye!"

He thundered ponderously away, the victim of a wild fever, a furious activity of the heart, that seemed to carry him on the wings of the wind at a smooth, restful speed along an endless lane of blossoms.

Following this startling occurrence, the Maplewood Speed King's hours at the shop were cut short and shorter until in the end he barely took time to drive in and explain what had happened the evening before. As soon as he had made clear what he had said and what she said in reply thereto and what the speed boat had done in the meantime, he would consult a new nickel-plated watch and would discover that it was about time for him to be on his way to an important business appointment. He would urge his plethoric conveyance into action and would disappear in a haze of romantic blue smoke.

Soon his thoughts, as evidenced by his conversation, took up a new direction. He no longer talked of cylinders and power alone. He dealt with the tonic of money and the proper way to acquire it "in bundles," if we may use his own expression. He professed to vague intentions of taking over the Maplewood Agency of the Rapid Four, of starting a motion picture show and of gaining a substantial competence through the buying, rehabilitating and selling of second-hand cars. He even hinted that he might respond to the urgings of a hazy character in his life whom he referred to as "the old man," and, so responding, take the job of floor boy in a county bank. He was not so much in favor of this last, however, for which he cannot be blamed, since the force employed by the aforesaid bank included a cashier, two tellers and only one floor boy, so that his duties would have been, necessarily, multitudinous and varied.

Then the wheel of fortune spun suddenly. Thomas Morgan was plunged to the depths, while another man arose on high. This other man, a malevolent, red-headed young person of the name of Clarence Snyder was one of those capitalists who have become such a menace to the peace and quietude of our nation. His father was a plutocrat who had for a score of years operated a flour mill, with considerable honest profit to him-

self. During the war this profit had increased in a way that allowed him to purchase for his son Clarence a most remarkable, light-footed roadster. And Clarence, after passing the speed boat of Maplewood some four or more times on the road, became acquainted with and enamoured of the girl.

She was a very pretty girl.

At the same time, the speed boat of Thomas Morgan developed internal troubles almost as serious as those suffered during that period by its unlucky owner. It began to snort in a pathetic way while in motion and to proceed in jerks. Also, it uttered a curious whistling whine which not only disturbed such passengers as might be in it but attracted attention and brought forth undesirable comment from pedestrians and small boys along the streets and ways.

The girl did not like it.

Morgan became distraught and frantic. Each day, he would spend long hours tinkering with the vitals of his car, only to assemble it hurriedly as the afternoon waned. He could then be found, traveling at a snail's pace along the country roads while he listened, with ear cocked, to its noises, or fumbled at such portions of the mechanism as he could reach with his disengaged hand.

He visited the Day-Nite Agency only at long intervals. When he did come, he would creep toward his chair, a creature of blackened face and hands, of funereal, grease-stiffened garments. For a time he would sit in helpless silence, only to leap to his feet at last, hurry to his car and dismember it, scattering vertebrae on the sidewalk and borrowing necessary tools from the shop. When the nickel-plated watch informed him of the approach of the usual appointment, he would replace the scattered parts and go, with a shamed eye for the gallery.

Morgan loved the girl. That was the long and short of it. He loved her as well as a young man can; but the girl, although she had been educated to the joys of motoring in the speed boat, could not now forego the pleasure of riding in the light-footed, spick and span roadster. Serious people, who spend a great deal of time discussing the problems of the day, find this tendency of modern young women alarming. Girls of the younger sort, they say, seem to care for nothing but the pleasures of motoring in fine cars and seem willing to make any sacrifices, to go to any lengths, to indulge themselves in it. Tom Morgan, could he have joined such a discussion, would undoubtedly have subscribed to this fact.

Of course, the worth-while girls, as serious people call them, do not do such things. Tom's girl, therefore, was probably not worth while. Probably, Tom was wasting time and good, honest emotion on her but that didn't make it hurt any the less. However bad the effect for society at large, it was worse for Tom. He was in love and the girl was turning to another man who had a better machine.

Further, Clarence was a young man of parts and graces, one who scorned to appear with grease on his hands or memories of it beneath his finger nails. He was also one of those stuck-up returned sailors, whereas Tom had been refused for military service because of broken arches. Altogether, Clarence appeared to own a fatal fascination and a fatal suitability for the girl, and that was what caused Morgan's hands to tremble as he fitted the parts of the old Pope engine back in place after each overhauling. That was what caused hope to light his eyes when he cranked it and, equally, that was what caused the light to die when he heard it rattle and wheeze as much as ever.

With affairs in this shape, the wheel of fortune turned again. It is impossible, as everyone knows, to tell when the wheel is going to turn and it is likewise impossible to tell what the result will be.

One afternoon, Morgan met the girl,

quite by accident of course, near a corner grocery store.

"Hello!" said Morgan, dully hopeful.

The young lady's personality surrounded her in joyful brilliance that day.

"Hello, Tommy," she greeted.

Morgan took his place beside her.

"Like—like t' go riding this evening?" he asked.

She smiled upon him kindly.

"Yes, Tommy," she accepted.

"'Bout eight?"

She nodded.

"Be there at eight," announced Morgan, his being alive with joy.

Morgan had a secret. On the day before, he had bought a shiny roadster seat with sumptuous leather cushions. It had come off the wreck of a rich man's car, but the seat had not been injured and looked good as new. Further, on that same day before he had given his battered engine hood a coat of shiny, quick-drying paint. Now, he had but to hurry home, tighten the new roadster body in place, a matter of an hour or so, and be ready to give the girl a grand surprise when he came for her.

This he did, working like a slave all afternoon. He found time to grind his valves and clean the crank case, too, also to wash the wheels. When he went to supper he was dead tired but extremely happy. To-night's run should put him back in the race for the girl's affections.

But when, at quarter of eight, the Maplewood Speed King went to the shed behind his home—only courtesy could give it the name of garage—he found the old speed boat unwilling to run for the first time in its history. He cranked like a demon for half an hour. He struggled, fought, flooded the carburetor and primed the cylinders, all to no avail. At last, in desperation, he laid aside his coat and shirt and plunged into the car's interior. He discovered at last, that one of the bolts of the new body had cut the ancient wiring, which passed beneath the seat, causing a short circuit.

It was the work of a minute to repair it but when this was done, it was necessary to run into the house, clean up again and resume his shirt, collar and coat. He was half an hour late, even then. And, at the last, when he tried to start the motor, it still refused to go! With sinking heart, the young man gave up the fruitless battle and hurried to the girl's house on foot.

He arrived at the corner of her street just in time to see the light-footed speedster move away from the curb before her home. It passed him. In it were Clarence and the girl, laughing gaily, as over a great joke. They did not notice Tom, where he stood dejected in the shadow of the trees that lined the street. His rival had dropped in, discovered his defection and had blithely stolen his engagement. Tom stole home to live through centuries of tragedy and sleeplessness.

Next morning, however, there was a change. Tom Morgan found the community of Maplewood electrified, with a bit of news. A man had been seriously injured on the evening before. He had been struck by an automobile while crossing a street and the motorist, instead of stopping to see what damage had been done, had fled, putting on more speed and escaping before anyone recognized him. One bystander, however, had remarked a certain fact and was willing to swear to it. The car which had done the damage was a long, low speed craft and it had a Maplewood license. He was certain of that because Maplewood licenses were rather square and of pale yellow, with blue figures, while city licenses were black and white. Of course he could not swear to the color, having glimpsed the car after dark but he could be sure of the shape of the license, because he had run after the car, trying to make out the number.

A little bit later that day, Tom Morgan received a summons to appear at a judicial inquiry to be held during the afternoon at the Police Court. The city

authorities, he learned, were proceeding in the rather informal way possible to officials of smaller towns. They knew that the injuries had been inflicted by one of the few long, low speedy cars in Maplewood, and they were summoning the owners of all such vehicles to the investigation. Tom felt this to be a hideous mockery, in view of the failure of his car to run at such a crucial time as last evening, but, of course, there was nothing to do but attend since the Mayor had appointed the commission of inquiry and subpoenas had been issued.

Tom did not even look at his car that morning. He was too sick of it, too disgusted with it. Instead, he went forth, rather aimlessly, and wandered along the streets. He felt oddly out of place as a pedestrian. It had been years since he had walked around town in this way. Certainly, he had never done so since he began building the speed boat. It was a terrible come down. He felt that people were covertly smiling about it.

After a time, although he acknowledged it was to pursue a dying hope, he made his way to the girl's house, to apologize for his failure to keep the engagement of the evening before. Of course, his explanation would only end his chances altogether but, nevertheless, something might turn up in his favor.

He found the girl willing, even eager to see him. She seemed frightened and there were indisputable traces of tears upon her countenance. She drew Tom aside into a vine-sheltered corner of her little porch. When she spoke, her tones were tremulous.

"Tommy," she asked, "did you hear about the accident?"

"Yeah," nodded Tom, startled by a thought. "I got subpoenaed!"

"Oh," she gasped. "Tommy, I've got to go too!"

"Yeah," agreed Tommy, contemplatively. "I saw you start out with Clarence. I came too—too late. Did they find out about you going with him?"

The girl nodded in the affirmative, uttering a little moan at the same time.

"That was what I came to see you about," began Tom, stammering in desperation. "I couldn't get the—"

"That's all right, Tommy," interrupted the girl, with a sudden tremor. "Oh, I wish you could have come on time!"

"I do too," averred Tom Morgan, "I'm sorry—"

"Tommy!" exclaimed the girl, interrupting again. "Is it so awful to lie, when they send for you that way?"

Tommy was startled.

"Lie?" he asked. "You betcha! It's perjury!"

The girl's rosy countenance whitened to her very lips.

"Why?" choked Tom. "Did you—"

"Yes," she cried, shrilly, "it was us did it! Clarence was—he was looking at me—and he walked right in front of us!"

She covered her eyes.

"By thunder!" exclaimed Tommy in querulous tones. "By thunder!"

"What'll they do to him?" whispered the girl. "What'll they do?"

"I dunno! It's reckless driving! Prison—maybe! Likely that's what they'll do. He shouldn't have run away afterward. That's an offense, too!"

The girl uttered a strangled sound. Tom stared at her, amazed at such emotion.

"They won't do anything to you, though," he consoled. "It's terrible, but why didn't he stay and see about it?"

The girl caught his arm fiercely.

"I don't care about me," she proclaimed in tones of hysteria. "I don't care about me! It's him! He loves me, Tommy! He was—he was—that was what made him forget to steer. And now, he's apt to go to—"

Her tongue refused the word and the sentence ended in an unintelligible mumble.

Tom Morgan, with his little personal universe a blasted, blue ruin, strove ineffectually to calm her and at last went

away, walking feebly after the manner of a man whose nervous system has suddenly gone wrong. As he proceeded home, his mentality strove to grasp the idea that he had lost the girl, that she loved another, while at the same time it swirled around a sudden idea that had come to him.

"Why not?" he asked himself. Did he love her? If he did, wasn't his duty plain before him? The answer to the question came in a surge of resolution. He ran the balance of the way home and entered his shed. There, he stripped for action and fiercely flung the engine hood to the ground. Last night's trouble was soon revealed to him. A wrench, dropped in his flurried endeavors to fix the wiring, had dented the soft copper of the gasoline pipe at a point where it was bent sharply. The dent had choked the flow of gasoline. With a cry of delight, Tom set to work upon it and, in less than ten minutes, had the motor running.

That afternoon the gathering spectators at the Police Court beheld a curious sight. Out of a cloud of dust came the speed boat, thundering its ominous roar. It had just been driven down the long hill on purpose. As it came to a screeching stop, Thomas Morgan, with a queer, desperate swagger, climbed out of it and shouldered his way inside. Those who saw, nodded to each other significantly. Thomas Morgan, they were saying, was the boy who had been speed mad for years, and he had never amounted to much anyway.

The inquiry began. Justice Ramsey, the town's police magistrate, called for order and opened the proceedings with a little speech. He announced that a crime had been committed and proclaimed his hope that this inquiry would bring to light the man who had been so dead to all human feelings, so cowardly, as to run away from the scene of an accident. With this in view, they had summoned everyone who might have some knowledge of the affair. The speech was so vindictive that it made a stir and everyone applauded vigorously, with the exception of Tom.

He was watching Clarence and the girl who, although they appeared to approve the tenor of Ramsey's words, had both assumed a give-away pallor. Thomas, in the silence that followed the little burst of applause, hawked loudly and shuffled his feet with a hard sneer upon his countenance. Again did the murmuring audience comment on his well-known recklessness.

The Mayor and the Chief of Police took places beside the Justice. The City Attorney assumed the duties of prosecutor. With a significant glance toward the commission on the bench, he called for the first witness, Clarence Snyder.

Snyder, under oath, affirmed that he had gone out riding the evening before with a young lady. They had followed a road toward St. Louis, had attended a motion picture show and had returned about half past ten. He knew nothing of the accident until told of it this morning. During all of his testimony, however, there was a desperate calm in his manner which attracted the attention of the more experienced hangers-on of the courtroom and caused a buzz of comment to arise.

As Snyder finished, the prosecutor nodded to him to descend, then appeared to change his mind and motioned him to the stand for additional examination.

"You know nothing of this accident then?" asked the attorney.

"No, sir."

"Were you visited by one of the city policemen this morning?"

"Yes, sir."

"Did he make an examination of your car as it stood in the garage?"

"Yes, sir."

"Did you see him remove a piece of cloth, or a torn bit of clothing, from a cotter pin on the steering knuckle?"

A glaze of terror settled upon the features of Snyder.

"No—no, sir!" he shouted suddenly.

With the graphic theatricality of a good jury lawyer, the prosecuting attorney walked to his table and took therefrom a soiled bit of blue serge cloth. Clarence Snyder, rising to his feet, extended a pleading hand.

"I didn't—" he began, but was interrupted.

Tom Morgan, seeing the danger, arose abruptly and slouched forward, speaking with a curious ring in his voice.

"There's no use going on!" he announced. "I hit him!"

There was a gasp of amazement, a hum of voices.

"Do you desire to make the confession that you were guilty of this accident?" asked the prosecutor, somewhat taken aback.

"Yes," answered Tom. "I did it. I was going too fast to stop!"

His eye met the girl's. Surprise, wonder, dumb questioning was there.

"I guess that's all, isn't it?" he asked.

"Yes," answered the attorney sharply, "I guess that's all for you, Thomas Morgan. Your confession will be noted in the record, and that is sufficient. The motive for it, we believe, will not be hard to find. Take your seat!"

Wondering, Tom returned to his chair. The prosecutor faced the commission.

"With the permission of the commission, Morgan's confession will be noted and I will proceed with the examination of Mr. Snyder. Let me remark, however, that I am a personal friend of Mr. Morgan's father, and that I was a visitor at his home last night and that, to my certain knowledge, Tom Morgan was working in his garage all evening, unable to start his car. When he finally left his home he left on foot!"

A chorus of laughter greeted this statement, while the Maplewood Speed King hung his head in shame.

"Nobody," continued the merciless prosecutor, "ever saw that car of his going fast enough to hurt anyone anyhow. Any ordinary pedestrian could dodge it, and any man not deaf could hear it coming a block away."

With this, the prosecutor again directed attention to the bit of cloth.

"Now then, gentlemen, I desire to introduce to your attention this piece of cloth which Mr. Snyder says he did not see removed from his roadster this morning. I also desire to introduce this affidavit of the injured man, who claims to have recognized the driver and the car that struck him."

Tom Morgan collapsed in his chair. He did not look up again. In half an hour, the inquiry was over and Clarence Snyder had been arrested and bound over for trial at the county court on a charge of reckless driving. As the crowd slowly filed away, the girl came over to Tom. She was sobbing.

"That was—was nice of you, Tommy," she said. "You're a wonderful boy!"

There was no answer to this overture. Tom sat with lowered countenance, apparently unable to hear or to realize what her change of manner might mean. Hesitating, the girl went on:

"You're all right, Tommy. I didn't get it at first. I see now; you thought I was engaged to him, because I told you he loved me. But I wasn't. I—I'd just turned him down, and he said that caused the accident."

Tom sat unmoved. The girl spoke again, compassion in her voice.

"I've just been thinking, too," she explained, "that you—you would never ask me to lie for you—even if your nice old car could hit anybody!"

Tom raised his eyes and glared at her in hopeless misery. The girl stepped back, startled by his expression. He got to his feet, trembling.

"You!" he accused, somewhat enigmatically. "You!"

Of a sudden, he pushed her aside and ran from the room. He did not heed her call to him. Springing at his car, he cranked it with the desperation of a mad

man. He leaped to the driver's seat, while the girl watched him. Quivering little grooves formed about her lips and her eyes shone with terror.

Then, understanding smoothed her countenance. She ran across the sidewalk and scrambled to the seat beside him, placing a tremulous hand on his arm.

"Tommy!" she pleaded. "Tommy!"

He hesitated, with a hand on the gear lever, staring at her, dazed with the fury that burned him.

"Yeah?" he gulped.

"Just wanted to say, Tommy—just to say—please don't you go and get reckless—and hurt yourself—just because you're mad at what that lawyer said!"

Fury gave way to suspicion.

"Hurt myself?" he whispered, scrutinizing her carefully. "Hurt myself?"

"Y' run too fast, Tommy," warned the girl. "Y're always running too fast! It's dangerous!"

For a long minute, while the engine roared, his eyes questioned her sincerity. Finally, as his youthful temper died, he put the car in motion.

"Take y' home?" he asked. "Take y' home?"

Two hours afterward as the evening twilight fell, the speed boat came majestically up to its accustomed docking place before the Day-Nite Tire Agency. The Maplewood Speed King, with something of his old swagger, dismounted and took his chair.

He was silent for a long time, eyeing the somber hulk at the curbstone.

"She had th' speed all right," he protested at last, startling those who were near. "She *had* it, but she ain't what she used to be. She's done her work—good work—and that's all!"

IMAGINATION

By HENRY LEVERAGE

Entered in the BLACK CAT *Short-Story Contest*

HERE Hersey crosses State, in Doyertown —a Middle-Western city of good standing —far from the civic center and the trolley loop, at midnight, with a grayish mist rising from the suburban lots, a man stopped, lighted a cigarette, and examined the lock on a mail box.

This mail box was exactly like two hundred and seventy-three others in the postal zone of Doyertown. It had one advantage over the others, an advantage the man relied upon when he tossed away the cigarette, pulled a tempered-steel jimmy from his overcoat pocket, and pried the box from its post without detection.

Staggering under the weight of the box, the man went across lots to a frame building in course of erection, where, after making certain he had not been followed, he removed the lock with more than ordinary skill.

Leaving the vicinity of Hersey and State Streets, the man walked through dreaming avenues to his lodgings and, after bolting a door and pulling down a shade, he made a key that fitted the lock and every other mail box lock in Doyertown.

Imagination, the misused gift of a fairy godmother, stamped the man's features and large gray eyes. He saw, in the key he had fashioned out of dull brass, a means to a fortune measured in five, perhaps six figures.

Once or twice in his life he had done the same thing and gotten away with it. The police and plain-clothes men of Doyertown were easy. They had no imagination. They worked by rule of thumb, plodding and watching and rounding up suspects.

Charles Ray rather thought he was a match for all the police of Doyertown. The act of taking the lock, simple in itself, was expected to lead to big results. There were precautions to be taken, however, which he set about to do.

The key would be safe in his pocket for the present. The tiny key-vise, the thin files, and scraps of brass were dangerous things to have around. The jimmy was an article to be hidden.

He secreted all these by unscrewing a radiator-plate from the wall, and lowering a small black bag at the end of a double loop of black thread, tested for its strength. He replaced the radiator-plate and rubbed the bright spots from the screws.

The lodging he had taken was only temporary. Pens, ink, blotters, a sheet of glass, three phials of acids, razor-sharp erasers and other implements of the penman's art were securely locked in a suitcase. The landlady was a peering soul with a kindly face. She believed Ray's story that he was a traveler for a publishing house, come to town to take orders for a line of boy's adventure books.

The gift of imagination had made Ray a loquacious talker, glib, convincing, direct. His mind worked by split seconds. He had already, in fancy, finished up his business in Doyertown and was on his way to New York.

There remained the details of carrying out his plan, all set down in his brain like a general's review of a battle. Ray left

his lodgings on the morning after the rape of the mail box and visited a pawnshop where, by leaving a deposit, he secured a moth-eaten postman's uniform and a leather pouch.

"Wrap them up in double paper!" he ordered. "I'm going to a mask ball tonight."

Keen-glancing, alert, lanky and altogether like a mailman, Ray made the rounds of the office buildings late that afternoon. He collected a pouch full of letters. The key he had made fitted every lock. He was careful to leave a few letters in each box for the genuine collector whose schedule he had timed on the first day of his arrival at Doyertown.

He had a close call once when emerging from a revolving door of a building wherein was located the city's detective department.

A burly man, with sleuth written all over his big hands and square jaw, helped revolve the door.

Ray, on the alert and somewhat weighted down with the pouch-full of stolen letters, saw this detective's profile in the revolving glass. It was a man he knew, from former experiences—Calvin Grimm, a plodder, unimaginative, relentless, a detailist in a world of fancy and flight.

Grimm was going to headquarters. Ray wondered, as he hurried toward his lodgings, if the detective department had yet been notified of the theft of a mail box at the corner of Hersey and State Streets.

Doyertown was the second largest city in the state. The detective department consisted of seventy-five sergeants, who had much to do. Ray rather thought such a trifle as the purloining of a mail box would attract little attention from the powers that ruled.

He locked his room door, unslung the mail pouch from his shoulder, pulled down the shade and removed the postman's uniform. This, with the empty pouch was laid in one corner of the room. The letters, to the number of a hundred or more, covered the red counterpane of the bed.

Ray opened these letters with a sharp knife, being careful not to cut their contents, which for the most part consisted of typewritten or scribbled letters of no consequence.

He found, out of the hundred odd letters, seven containing checks. It was shortly after the first of the month and these checks were attached to invoices.

Ray allowed his imagination to soar when he picked up one check, worth all his trouble. It was drawn on the First National Bank by a broker to a customer. There was a statement of account pinned to the check.

He gathered the useless letters into a wad, crammed them in the mail pouch, added the uniform and any scraps of paper he had dropped, and dressed in a neat-fitting black suit.

Taking every precaution against being seen at his lodgings, he went to the river, weighted the pouch with a cobble stone, watched it sink in a concentric series of black ripples, and again allowed his imagination to soar. He had, securely buttoned in his inner coat pocket, seven checks which could be raised, altered, or washed by an acid which he had found remarkably effective in enterprises of a similar nature.

The art of forgery reached a high state under Ray's skillful fingers. He needed money and he had imagination. The checks, particularly the broker's, went through a magical transformation wherein oxalic acid, bleaching liquid, glass erasers, a perforating punch and transparent glue, each served its part.

One check was spoiled, another destroyed by burning it in a washbowl and crumbling the ashes to black powder. Five remained, all made out to James Cunningham and dated slightly ahead of the original date.

Ray corked his ink bottles, cleaned his

pens, washed his hands and searched the room for possible clues. He had brought two suitcases to Doyertown with him. In one he packed all the paraphernalia of the forger's art, soiled linen, a cap and a few useless magazines, and checked this case at the check-room of the nearest railroad station. He concealed the claim-check in a washroom behind a small metal sign, where it could be obtained if necessary.

The imaginative gift, coupled with an open-handed generosity, had left him short of cash when the time had came to lay the checks.

He purchased, with his last dollar, a pair of tinted goggles and a soiled linen duster, left in a pawnshop by a motorist.

Working rapidly, despite the presence of the detectives and bank guards, he succeeded in obtaining a trifle over six thousand dollars on the raised and altered checks whose signatures were in each instance genuine.

He carried his operations with a high hand, waited once while a bank 'phoned the original drawee of the check, forged three indorsements when questioned by paying tellers, and was forced to leave one check, the largest one, behind while he fled through crowded streets, shedding his auto coat and goggles.

The six thousand dollars, although a considerable sum, was hardly worth the chances Ray had taken. He realized this when he reached his room, changed his suit, put on a high collar, and otherwise altered his appearance by pulling a lock of gray hair over his forehead and removing a conspicuous gold cap from a perfectly good tooth.

Doyertown, with its unimaginative police department, was still easy.

Ray believed that by taking precautions of the most ordinary kind, he could leave the Middle West with a man's sized fortune, perhaps fifty thousand dollars.

He switched from forgery, changed his lodgings, sought out a family hotel of the better order, and apparently settled down as a manufacturer, ready and eager to open up a factory.

"You see," Ray told a few spirits around the hotel, "I'm starting the National Sawpulp Company. There's no stock for sale but I want a few good directors."

He secured a letter from the hotel manager to a small bank, far from the locality of the larger ones that had cashed his raised and altered checks.

The president of this bank was perfectly willing to take five thousand cash on deposit from a gray haired stranger who talked understandingly of sawpulp and location sites and dockage on the river.

A corporation lawyer, located over the bank, drew up Ray's articles of incorporation, furnished the seal, stock certificates and books for one hundred and seventy-three dollars.

Ray had reached a point in his flight of extended imagination where he needed a confederate or at least a willing dummy.

He considered the corporation lawyer, who was really a shyster of the first-water, and marked him from his list. The clerk at the hotel could not be expected to deceive anyone in Doyertown. The manager of the hostelry was a very sharp man. Ray dismissed him and found in Jones, a billiard player, card fiend, hanger-on about the hotel and golf course, a kindred spirit who was bubbling over with larceny.

Jones earned three thousand a year and spent seven or ten. He wore loud clothes and was well known in Doyertown. He had a moon-shaped face, small feet and a remarkably dainty pair of hands.

"It's this way, Mr. Jones," said Ray. "You and I are out to make a living, anywhere this side the law."

Jones admitted that much.

"I've made out a few notes," continued Ray handing them over. "They are for

money you advanced to the National Sawpulp Company. See, they're signed by myself as president and treasurer. I want you to hold them a while, then sell them."

Jones shook his head, although he clutched the notes in his tiny hands. "Old game," he said. "If I try to sell them, the would-be buyers will go to the bank and make inquiries."

"There's five thousand in the bank, now."

Jones saw a light. "You mean the notes will apparently be met when they fall due."

"Yes. The bank will say the National Sawpulp Company is good for any one of those notes. Perhaps it will be good for them all, when they fall due. At any rate, Jones, it's a legitimate proposition."

Jones, who had no imagination, took time to think Ray's proposition over. The longer he thought, the better he liked the deal. It stood to reason that if buyers could be found for the notes, and the National Sawpulp Company was a legitimate corporation, there was no fraud, even if the notes were not met when due.

"Let the buyer beware," said Ray. "You loaned the company money on the notes. Now sell them."

Jones went forth and sold the notes, one at a time, and in some cases, at a discount. He explained to his friends that he had loaned the corporation money, and was a little short of cash. Would they help him carry the load until maturity day?

Ray received a report and whatever money Jones had obtained, each night. He gave Jones a percentage of the gains. He made out more notes and increased the National Sawpulp Company's account in the bank to ten thousand dollars.

Some inquiries had come in to the note teller about the notes. All he could say, after consulting the books, was that the company had a large account, and the notes would probably be met.

Ray walked Doyertown's paved streets and allowed his fancies to soar. He had entered the city almost broke. Imagination had lifted him above the herd. He sensed, now and then, that old Calvin Grimm and others of the detective force, might be searching for a thin young man, wearing goggles and an auto duster. They would hardly suspect in him the object of their search. It took imagination to see a man in another guise, and Doyertown's detectives were all thick-looking family men who had risen from the police force.

Once he saw Grimm, when that detective strode past the hotel porch and went on toward the western division of town.

Ray threw his mind back to his other meetings with Grimm. Five years before he had wiggled out of the detective's clutches at a small junction near the railroad station. Again Grimm had seen him when he was guised as a postman. The third sight of the sleuth was a trifle disconcerting.

It came to Ray, as he rocked back and forth, and traced a circle with the ferrule of his cane on the porch, that the plodder sometimes caught the hare.

Grimm was certainly a plodder, thick-necked, beetle-browed, huge of hands and feet. He possessed, so far as outward manifestations showed, about as much brains as a wooden sign.

His record was good at headquarters. He brought in a suspect, now and then. He made up in perseverance what he lacked in imagination.

Ray dwelt on these facts and dismissed the detective from his mind. He dreamed of doubling up on the National Sawpulp deal, enlisting other dummies like Jones, and cleaning big—perhaps a half-million. There was another legitimate proposition which was within the law, a fake oil-well, salted with crude petroleum, and the land around this well closely held by a group of dummies who would part with their outside holdings without selling any of the fake-well stock.

This idea needed smoothing over. Ray waited for Jones, who, when he came, gave the signal that he had sold another note and that his room door would be open.

"Tough stuff," declared the stout dummy, "but I put one over on a garage dealer. He called up the bank and they said that you had money enough on deposit to meet the note."

"Sure it's there now," said Ray, "but I'm not guaranteeing when that money will be drawn out."

"Neither does the bank."

Ray crammed his share of the proceeds from the sale of the note to the garage dealer in a leather pocketbook, already well-lined with bills of large denominations. It came to him, with an inspirational flash, that the time had arrived either to play a bigger game or to leave Doyertown forever.

There was a flaw in Jones's operations which an energetic district attorney might get home to a jury. The stout dummy could not show an actual transfer of cash to the National Sawpulp Company. He had a right to buy notes at any price, but the day was coming when shrewd questions would be asked and the answers verified.

Ray took stock of his cash, made out two more notes, for rather small amounts —five hundred dollars in each instance— gave these to Jones, and told him to sell them for whatever he could get.

"That finishes the deal," he said. "You loaned the National Sawpulp Company thirty-six thousand dollars. You secured short-time notes as your protection. Then, being caught in the market, or for any other reason whatsoever, you were forced to hypothecate the notes to your friends."

Jones had consulted an attorney. "Perfectly legitimate," he said. "I could have secured the notes from you for a dollar and other good and valuable consideration. I expect you to skip out and let me hold the bag. All right, skip!"

"You won't have as many friends as you had, Jones."

"To hell with friends! Money is the best friend!"

Ray had an inspiration that night. He saw a way to double the proceeds of the note deal by using Jones as a willing tool.

Dressing in the morning with more than ordinary care, he visited three minor banks outside the trolley-loop district of Doyertown, and rented, at each bank, a large safe-deposit box.

He had no trouble securing these by paying a year's rent in advance. The bank officials were glad to get his money. He left the last bank, looked around sharply, and started for the hotel.

A sense of danger came to him which was hard to throw off. He saw a fancied shadow dodging behind him. He rounded on this man and found he was a harmless citizen. Still the feeling of danger remained. It occurred to him suddenly, in one of those flash moments of depression, that he had gotten away with considerable in Doyertown.

The detectives had most certainly been looking for him. They were probably working on the series of mail box forgeries and searching for a tall young man wearing an auto coat. Perhaps they had left this description at every bank.

He had played them for wooden men, plodders who worked by rule of thumb. They might become inspired enough to widen their inquiries and search the hotels.

Ray waited for Jones, paced the porch, thrashed over the new scheme he had started in operation, and decided, before Jones arrived, that he would play double or quits with Doyertown and the detective department within two days.

To Jones he said when that individual puffed up the hotel's steps and mopped a smooth brow with a blue-bordered handkerchief:

"Can you get me a man who will lend seventy-five thousand on good securities?"

"How good?" asked Jones.

"U. S. Bonds."

"Sure."

"I'm going to buy thirty thousand dollars' worth to-morrow. I'll put them in a safe-deposit box. I'll introduce you to the banks where I have rented the boxes. You take the man who will loan the money and show him box number one with thirty thousand in Government Bonds laid away. Then I'll draw these bonds out, run to the next box, plant them there, and you bring on the man, and show him the same bonds. Do it at another place. He'll think you own ninety thousand dollars worth of bonds."

Jones was willing after an hour's deep thought.

"Good idea," he said catching the idea.

Ray leaned over his stout dummy's shoulder.

"Did you cash those two notes?" he asked.

"Yes."

"Who bought them?"

Jones chuckled deep in his throat. "I knew a couple of headquarters men who had saved some money. They're just as easy as anybody else. Told them I was short of cash. They took the notes to the bank. Note teller said National Sawpulp Company had ten thousand on deposit and looked like a going concern. So the two detectives bought the notes."

Ray experienced a slight feeling of dizziness. Jones had gone too far. There was danger in the notes when sold to a brace of detectives. The signature as cashier and treasurer might match some of the old endorsements on the checks Ray had cashed in his early operations at Doyertown.

"What's th' matter?" asked Jones.

Ray looked around the deserted porch of the hotel. Everybody was at dinner. Music floated out through the windows.

"Who were the detectives?" he queried.

"One was Flood and the other was a big boob named Grimm."

Ray dropped his cane and picked it up quickly. It came to him that Grimm was just the kind of man to buy a bogus note from a friend. Also Grimm might compare the signature on the bottom of the note with the forged checks which were probably on exhibit at detective headquarters.

"I'll trouble you for my end of the money you got," Ray said to Jones. "I'm going up to my room for a few minutes."

Jones handed Ray six hundred dollars. He kept four hundred for his share.

"How about that safety-box idea," he suggested when Ray showed signs of moving off.

"See you in the morning, Jones."

Ray lay across his bed, pressed his eyes tightly shut, and allowed his imagination to soar. He saw visions of Grimm taking the trail and making the arrest. Grimm's partner, Flood, might get suspicious at any moment. A score of trifles had been overlooked. The net seemed about to close. A man could not expect to get away with inspirational larceny always.

Panic of a serious kind swept over Ray. He hinged himself on the bed, looked at his suitcase, clothes, hat and overcoat, and sprang to the carpet where he hastily packed everything.

He went down stairs, leaned across the desk in the lobby, and said to the clerk:

"Called away over night. I may have to send for my things. If I do I'll notify you later."

Freed from the stifling menace of the hotel, Ray walked through dreaming streets until midnight. He was done with Doyertown. Jones had sounded the retreat when he sold the notes to the detectives. This action had carried matters too far.

Ray let his good judgment master his imagination. He found a small hotel where he secured a room for the night, awoke early, hurried to the bank and drew out all but one hundred dollars of the deposit to the credit of the National

Sawpulp Company. He made no explanation to the paying teller.

Pocketing these bills after spreading them flat in a pocketbook, he circled the city and considered his getaway from every direction.

There were a few articles in his suitcase which he wanted. Also, Jones and the dummy directors of the National Sawpulp Company should be appeased until the notes fell due and the crash came.

Ray decided to play safe in every direction. He waited until nightfall, entered a telephone booth, 'phoned Jones and one resident director of the company, told them he was going out of town, explained to Jones that he would let him know about the safe-deposit matter when he came back, then called the hotel clerk on the wire.

"Please send a messenger boy with my suitcase, cane and overcoat. I'm leaving the golf course in twenty minutes. Have the boy rush my things to the clubhouse. We're going to tour the northern part of the state."

Ray hung up the receiver and glided from the telephone booth. He reasoned that the clerk would afterward report to any inquiring detectives that he had left town via auto.

The golf clubhouse, where many autos always stood, was within short walking distance of the hotel. Ray strode down through an unlighted street, neared a corner, and, protecting himself by the trunk of an ancient elm, watched the front of the hotel.

He saw the messenger boy come down the steps and start toward the golf links. There was no shadow following the boy. Ray took every precaution, dodging, rounding blocks, falling in behind the boy, and waiting for a possible trailer.

"All right, boy," he said hurrying up. "My friends are waiting over there."

Ray pointed to an auto at a curb. The boy gave him the coat, cane, and suitcase, received a half-dollar, a sealed envelope for the hotel clerk, in which Ray had placed money for his bill, and went away whistling.

"Done!" said Ray watching the boy. "Now, here's where I leave Doyertown."

He had his plan mapped out in a general way. There remained an hour before he could catch the train he wanted, a local that stopped at a small suburban station and then went on by easy steam to a junction point where a faster train could be taken to Warrensburg, a large city in the southern part of the state.

Ray left the vicinity of the hotel and golf links, boarded a trolley, got off at a lighted corner, and entered a crowded motion-picture theatre where he elbowed his way to a dark, front seat, pushed his suitcase out of the way, hung his coat and cane over the back of the seat and sat down.

He watched the picture and timed himself to catch the train, leaving a few minutes to spare. He rose from his seat, lifted the suitcase, slung the coat and cane over his arm and started for the entrance of the theatre. A throng of patrons surged through the turnstile. The light was dim. Ray felt himself, buffeted, pressed against a stout woman, grabbed by the arm, and finally propelled by a guard out through a narrow passage at the side of the ticket window.

He adjusted his hat, rehooked his cane, slung his overcoat over his arm and lifted the suitcase. He started walking rapidly through an unlighted street toward the railroad station where a red semaphore gleamed like an eye of fire.

The street was lonely, deserted. No cheering whistle came from the expected accomodation train. Ray paused, shifted the weight of the suitcase, glanced down.

He stiffened. The case fell from his fingers and upended in the muddy gutter. The cane slid along his arm and hooked at his wrist.

Someone, a clever thief, had slit his coat with a sharp blade, extracted the wallet containing all the spoils he had

amassed in Doyertown, and escaped without detection.

The theft had taken place in the dark aisle of the motion-picture theatre. There was no use going back and making inquiries. Ray knew professional work when he saw it.

He stood, cursed his lack of foresight, examined all his pockets, stared up and down the street, and felt his nerve and imagination ooze from his body.

There seemed nothing to do save take the train and leave Doyertown. He had eighteen dollars in small bills which the pickpocket had overlooked. This would buy a ticket to Warrensburg and leave him a few dollars over.

Ray picked up the suitcase, started in the direction of the small station, hesitated a stride, wheeled and went back toward the trolley-loop district.

Red rage swept over him. He was not yet done with the town. There was a chance that the pocketbook might be taken to police headquarters.

He made inquiries from the ticket seller at the motion-picture theatre, and cross-questioned a uniformed guard. They had seen no sign of pickpockets. "Gwan," said the guard; "we don't let them in our place!"

Ray pointed to the neat cut across his perfectly good coat. The lining showed through this cut. The guard squinted and shook his head. "Looks like a safety-razor blade did that," he commented dully.

Determined on a revenge of some kind, Ray considered Jones, the dummy directors of the National Sawpulp Company, and other men he had met in Doyertown. It was a strange thing if he could not carry some money out of the city.

He found a lodging house, went to bed, reviewed the course of events, and decided that it would be dangerous to see Jones and the other men he had done business with. The alarm might already be out, and his description known at headquarters.

There was one way to get back some of the lost money and salve his injured feelings. Ray decided to begin all over again. He slept late, rose, went into a section of the city, little known to him, and purchased a tire iron, files and a strip of brass from an auto dealer.

The tire iron would answer for a jimmy. The files and brass were necessary in order to make a key that would fit the mail boxes. Ray, overcautiously, had thrown away the first key.

His plan was ambitious enough. He discounted the detective force of the city, and decided to rob a score of mail boxes in the business district, lay one forged check for expense money, and flee with other checks to Warrensburg where he could begin operations on a larger scale.

He left his lodgings, pulled down his hat, buttoned up his coat, and started walking toward Hersey and State Streets where he had first stolen the mail box in order to get a lock and make a key.

It stood to reason that the stolen box had been replaced. The district was a lonely one, ideal for his purpose. He knew the way about that end of town. There were other mail boxes around.

Ray neared the junction of Hersey and State Streets, dodged behind a high fence, looked out, and, lowering the jimmy from his sleeve, strode toward the mail box which he could dimly see under a yellow lamp.

There came lunging across lots, like an enraged bear, at the first sound of Ray's jimmy prying the box from the post, a burly figure brandishing a police regulation revolver.

This figure was joined by a second sleuth. They surrounded Ray, who stepped in a puddle, slipped, and found himself pinioned by four strong arms.

Grimm's voice was totally unimaginative, when he slipped the handcuffs on Ray's slender wrists:

"We've been watchin' this mail box for a long time, young man. Kinda thought you'd be back after more junk."

SIMPLE SIMON

By A. HAMILTON GIBBS

Entered in the* BLACK CAT *Short-Story Contest

IMON INGOLDSBY laid down his pen with a sigh and a shiver. It was two o' clock in the morning and the radiator had apparently gone to sleep.

Many pages of manuscript, covered with a small spidery handwriting littered the desk at which he sat. "I wonder whether this is the magnum opus?" he asked himself aloud, reaching out for a fifteen-cent can of tobacco which was on the corner of the mantelpiece. In that room it was possible to reach anything from anywhere. It was mostly bed and bureau. The window framed a beautiful view of a fire escape through which, by day, could be made out the companion escape and window of the room opposite.

The tobacco can was empty.

"Well," said Simon, dropping it into the waste basket, "it means that further work is postponed till the morning." He got up, yawned with a noise like a vacuum cleaner, stretched and began shedding his clothes. With careful fingers he folded his trousers in the proper but rather faded crease and put them under the mattress. The coat and vest he hung over the back of the one chair.

As he did so his stomach gave that mellifluous gurgle which is so often heard at early church service. Children generally call it collywobbles. Simon nodded. "Yes," he said, "I knew I was hungry before you said so. How does the old proverb go? 'He who sleeps dines.' I will now proceed to dine." His eye rested for a moment on a photograph tucked into the bureau mirror. "Good-night kid," said Simon and got into bed. For a moment or two he lay still with the blankets up to his nose and two eyes gazing into space. . . .

At the very same moment in a house on the other side of the Atlantic a girl in a gray-blue uniform ran down the stairs on her way to breakfast. She made her way to the hall table where the mail was arranged alphabetically. There were two addressed to Miss Althea Varick. She picked them up. "One from Simon!" A spark danced in her eyes as she went into the breakfast room, nodded good morning to the others already there, helped herself to coffee and toast and sat down. She read while she ate. ". . . the town without you is like a desert without an oasis, and that's a pretty bum kind of desert, believe me! However it's only half a year more before you return and that'll give me time to start making my pile. A fact which mitigates against swelled head is that this community seems to be able to get along very well without me. I went the rounds for jobs, any sort or kind, but they handed me the frozen mitt every place I walked into. You've always said that I'm a homely old duck. I begin to believe you. So I had a conference with myself which resulted in the purchase of many blocks of scribbling paper and the hire from a junk store of an obsolete typewriter which, after being severely monkeyed with by your nimble-fingered admirer, was cajoled into producing results. I don't know how many million words I've scribbled since then, but you'd better begin to keep an eye on the magazine market. My idea is to establish a corner in short stories. I haven't

sold anything yet but I'm certainly some writer. . . ."

The trouble with Simon was that he had graduated at football rather than at engineering, chemistry or any other of the applied sciences which conduce to a full stomach at the outset and lead to eventual pinnacles. To be sure he had obtained an A.B., but a knowledge of the Greek and Roman literature is more difficult to apply in the present scheme of citizenship than electricity, for instance; and his knowledge of the former was not so exhaustive that Harvard, Yale or Columbia were audibly clamoring for his services as a professor. But he scaled a hundred and ninety, and as a male being generated as much radio-activity and desire to achieve as any other less muscularly gifted but more intellectually-equipped fellow.

When his father died and the estate was valued at two thousand dollars, the world ceased to be a football club. Simon dropped out. His fraternity houses knew him no more. So like the rest of them he took the European trip and got a taste of No Man's Land. He also picked up a French ribbon and a captaincy, but when he walked out of the demobilization camp his principal possessions in the matter of souvenirs were a whole body and fifteen hundred dollars in cash.

Then he took the dollar a day room in the young men's boarding house with a free gymnasium upstairs. His one hostage to fortune was heart trouble and the cause of it was, as he put it, "rolling in spondulacks, darn it!" His jocose letter to her showed the frame of mind in which he faced the not very far distant prospects of penury. But he gave her no inkling of the door to door visitations to commercial firms, business houses and every place where employment is to be found if one has any merchantable quality. Simon may have had many qualities, but no one succeeded in finding one which might be turned to mutual profit. Each varyingly polite regret was like a nail hammered in the coffin of hope. Many of his father's friends and some of his college chums had invited him to invite himself for as long as he liked to their houses, but there was a hidden glint in his eye when he replied with a smile, "Many thanks, but there's a gym in my hotel."

A tropical sun on a pat of butter is not unlike the way in which living expenses affect one's bank roll. There was a sense of hurry in casting around for a line to which to direct his energies and he hit upon the fiction idea after his mental arithmetical faculties had been sharpened at lunch-wagon and lunch-counter comparisons. Even the enclosure of stamped addressed envelopes had not seemed a profitable investment when, instead of a check, the story itself came back with a deadly regularity. And as he lay on his bed that night cogitating, he told himself that it was a matter of angle. Take for instance the Ford car. It was the result of looking at motor mechanics from a new angle. Simon's immediate problem was to assure himself a permanent meal ticket and . . . He suddenly jerked himself up on one elbow. "By gosh!" he said. "By gosh, I believe I've got it!"

He gave a great kick and was out of bed and over at the table. With a wipe of his hand the manuscript floated to the floor. He seized a pencil and began doing little sums.

"If society won't provide you with what you want, provide society. Gee!" he gave a laugh. "It's simple. I'll buy one to-morrow!"

The springs protested again as he got back into bed and reached up with a long muscular arm.

The light flicked out.

Round the railing which enclosed the plot of grass and the statue which had given the square its name were many automobiles parked head-on at an angle to the railing under the trees. Their tail

lights on that soft spring night looked like the red eyes of a pack of fairy-tale wolves. The sidewalks were crowded with store clerks and factory hands, generally in male and female couples. The street cars clanged irritated warnings as they slurred grindingly round the corner, and the buzz of motor horns resembled a drive of bullocks as they crawled through the crossroads at about ten miles an hour.

An enormous motor truck piled high with crates of near beer turned into the parking space along the rail near a newly-painted and brightly-lighted lunch wagon which boasted the name "Ritz-Carlton" above its roof in changing-colored electrics. The driver stopped his engine, climbed down from his seat and looked the lunch wagon over with an approving eye.

"Some darned sparkle for a lunch cart!" he muttered. He went up the steps and in. "Hullo George!" he said and sat down at one end of the table-counter. "Cup er coffee and a hamburger!" His eye took in the broad shoulders of the white-coated cook and then wandered to the new china and fittings, all of which were so clean as to be almost unbelievable.

Beside a glittering cash register was a glass case of cigars and cigarettes. A large price list was tacked up over the stove. On either side were counsels of wisdom. One read, "If you can't smile before you eat, at least try to afterwards." The other was, "Don't say thank you. Tell your friends!"

The driver helped himself to a toothpick. "Some joint this! Just on the road?"

"You've guessed it," said the cook. "And as you're the first man in, you're the guest of the house. Go to it, son!" He placed the hamburger in front of the driver and opened the box of cigars. "Have one!"

"This is my lucky night," said the driver, taking two. "Hope it'll be yours."

"You bet!" said the cook. "Did you see the ball game, Saturday?"

"Say!" A glint came into the driver's eye. He delayed a mouthful on its way. "It's hard on the straw hats every time Babe Ruth makes a homer."

"Say Chief! Give me down two hot dogs with mustard and an egg sandwich." The voice came from outside the window.

The cook leaned out. "Be right with you," he said. He put two slices of bread with the knife on the wrapping paper, had an egg and two frankfurters sizzling with the speed of a conjurer and never stopped talking ball with the driver until the latter wiped his mouth on the back of his hand, lighted a cigar and nodded good-night with the promise to "spread the glad word."

Then the first house of the movies emptied itself and the twinkling electrics above the "Ritz-Carlton" raised several laughs and as many investigators. They laughed again when they were inside, for they found that the cook could serve quick answers as well as hot dogs. They jollied him because he wore white cotton gloves and flipped slices of bread, sausages, etc., with his knife on to the plates and never touched anything with his hands. In return he talked a blue streak about bacilli and contamination, preached the gospel of cleanliness, physical and mental, and though he made them laugh, there was a touch of common sense about him which robbed the gloves of their comic aspect. He caught their imagination as well as their attention and all unconsciously they lingered and were lured into second orders.

By midnight of that first night in business, when the cook cleaned up his gear, and, removing his coat, swabbed down the floor of the "Ritz-Carlton," emptied the cash register into his pocket, switched off the lights, locked up the wagon and walked away to the dollar a day room, it was proved that Simon Ingoldsby had in him a quality which the business

houses had overlooked—a touch of humanity, the gift of laughter and good fellowship with all and sundry. It was proved furthermore to be merchantable, if taken from the right angle. But although Simon had backed his convictions with his entire capital he was far from reaching the solution of his problems. It was all very well to laugh and say that as society refused him food, he was providing society with food. Yet, when he thought of Althea's world his courage weakened. He applied all the old arguments, that work was honorable, that democracy was more than a religion, that, so long as he was honest, he was just as good a man whether he sold hot dogs or bonds, as her father. But as the months went by and the day of her coming grew nearer, Simon confessed to nerves. He wrote her saying merely that he had started work down town, that the results were pretty good and offered hopes for a fairly lucrative future in course of time, if properly worked up. His faith in her was unshaken, but he wondered if he were not asking her to climb too big a barrier.

Within the first month he had avoided a fight with the owner of the rival cart on the opposite side of the square who had come over and made sarcastic remarks about his sky-signs.

Said Simon, "There's no copyright. If you think they're hurting your business, try some yourself. They'll improve the appearance of the square anyhow!"

The man tried Chinese lanterns instead, much to the amusement of Simon's regular clients, who already numbered about twelve, thanks to the truck driver of the first night who had kept his promise so well that all the near-beer trucks stopped there on their way to and from the factory.

Simon began to dream dreams when he found, as week followed week, that the profits showed a slight but steady increase. His imagination drew a picture of a gleaming "Ritz-Carlton" in every square of every town and city in the state, then spreading over into the next, north, south and west, until all the state roads were a-crawl with wagons, while the president and principal stockholder, Simon Ingoldsby, sat back with his wife and raked in the proceeds.

He began by opening up at five p. m. and working till midnight. This, single-handed, sent him back to the boarding house with a muscular ache that only wore off after the first fortnight. He introduced a paper rack which had copies of the evening papers and the current weeklies. He himself talked as hard as he worked to keep things going. Then it occurred to him that business might accrue if he were to open for the noon lunch hour. It did. He began to have rush hours, when twenty orders had to be supplied at once and which left him, beaded with perspiration, to get back his wind during the afternoon backwater.

The original proposition of being at least sure of enough to eat himself as long as the venture held good became a paradox. The venture was so good that finally it seemed that there was nothing in the world except food, no one in the world but people who were perpetually loading their stomachs, no smell but the smell of fats and cooking. He felt that he himself would never eat again, that if he could swallow tabloids he would be perfectly content. The mere sight of frankfurters, mustard and bread filled him with loathing.

But every night when he walked away and nodded to his friend the cop on the corner, he had got back something of an added self-respect from the thought that not only was he in definite relations with the commercial world, but that he was proving himself efficient in this age of specialization by his own unaided efforts. And the way led to Althea and beyond.

A fortnight before her return a man walked into the wagon just before midnight and asked for coffee and a doughnut. He looked down-at-heel, unkempt.

Simon was alone. "Why, hello Bill Judkins!" he said. "What are you doing around here?" He held out his hand.

The man started and stared. Then recognition came into his eyes, and pleasure and surprise. He wrung Simon's hand. "Why, Cap!" he said. "I never thought to see you on this job."

"I'm still in command," said Simon with a grin, "though it's a different show from No Man's Land. How are you making out?"

Judkins shrugged his shoulders. "Well, I've been on various jobs but I'm sorter floatin' around now as I ain't hooked up since I quit the last."

Simon handed him the coffee and the doughnut. "Get that inside you Bill and we'll talk," he said. "You and I have been in many a dinky little scrap together. If you're looking for someone to sign up with I believe you've come into the right shop."

Judkins spoke round a mouthful of doughnut. "D'you mean that, Cap?" he said. "Say, this is better coffee that I ever fixed for you at Chatoo Teary!"

Simon laughed. "I've had some practice since then. But you used to scare up firewood when there wasn't a tree, or a house, or a dump within ten kilos. How did you manage it Bill?"

"Say, cut it out Cap! There are pleasanter things to talk about than that. This is a dandy little joint. How long you been in business?"

"Long enough to make you an offer," said Simon, "if you're out for a good thing."

"Every time," said Judkins. "Shoot!"

"Twenty a week and your grub," said Simon. "On duty from twelve noon to two p. m. and from five p. m. till midnight. You find your own breakfast. I find the uniform."

Bill Judkins blew a cloud of cigar smoke, and twisted uneasily on his seat. His eyes found Simon's on him and then wandered away again. A touch of color came into his unwashed face. At last he leaned across the counter and burst out as though unable to help himself. "Listen, you always treated me square over there. I got to tell you. I didn't quit that last job. They fired me for doing a little phoney work on the side, see?"

Simon nodded. "That's all right, Bill Judkins," he said. "But you and I understand one another, don't we? How about it?"

Bill's muscles relaxed. "Gee!" he muttered; and in that one word was summed up all the loyalty and gratitude that is in the wag of a dog's tail when instead of a beating he feels a friendly hand on his head. He jumped to his feet and clicked his heels. "It's a picnic Cap! First parade at noon tomorrow?"

"Good for you, Bill! Come shaved. We're nutty on cleanliness in this hotel. What size gloves do you wear?"

"Gloves? Say, what're you givin' us?"

"Sure thing!" said Simon. "Get two pairs in the morning, cotton." He slipped a dollar bill across the counter.

There are moments, rare indeed, when extravagance descends upon one like a mantle of glory, like a divine intoxication, when the satisfaction of one's desire may plumb the depths of one's billfold and not cause a quiver even though that billfold may contain the results of prolonged sweat and much heart's blood. Such an one came to Simon when, on the way down to the boat to meet Althea, he stopped at the smartest florist's in town. Her family would be there he knew, and he would be able to snatch only the briefest moment of her attention. But that only encouraged him to a greater exaltation. All thoughts of frankfurters were left behind in that other existence where there was no Althea, and the perfume of lilies and roses wafted wonderful dreams through the medium of his olfactory senses.

He left the store looking like a wedding, or a funeral, after spending almost

twice Bill's weekly salary. His clothes were pressed and ironed and a new hat sat jauntily upon his head. He threaded his way through the crowd bearing his bouquet like a baby. It was just after noon and he had left Bill Judkins in sole charge of the "Ritz-Carlton." Bill was now able to flourish the breadknife in white cotton gloves with a facility which, in that circumscribed area, was almost a danger.

When the boat drew alongside Simon saw her at the rail. She was blowing kisses, doubtless to her family somewhere in the cheering crowd. But Simon would have taken oath before the Supreme Court that her eyes were on his and that therefore they were meant for him; and when, after an eternity of heaving, which was probably not more than five minutes, the gangway was in position and the passengers came streaming down, Simon was the first to meet her at the bottom. A hundred and ninety pounds is not to be denied in any crowd.

"Al!"

"Simon!"

"Gee! It's good to *see* you!"

Their hands met, and then of course the family appeared, and countless friends. It seemed to Simon as if the entire crowd had a prior claim on Althea. But anyhow they couldn't stop him from looking at her.

Finally a voice brought him back to earth. "Why, Captain Ingoldsby, we haven't seen you for so long! Where have you been hiding?" The words were none too cordial, and the eye behind them was less so.

Simon bowed. "If an excuse is necessary, Mrs. Varick," he said, "I'm afraid work is the only real one I can offer."

Althea came to his rescue. "You'll come and dine to-morrow night, won't you, Captain Ingoldsby? I've got so many adventures to tell you." She sniffed her bouquet. "And I expect you've had one or two which I'm dying to hear."

"Thank you very much," said Simon. "But my work makes dinner engagements very difficult. May I call you on the 'phone in the morning, Miss Varick?" Simon held out his hand.

Althea squeezed it. "Any time," she said. "Good-bye. I *love* your flowers!"

"Good-bye," said Simon. "Good-bye, Mrs. Varick. I know that you must be so glad that Al—that your daughter is back."

He dodged the cold bow and strode away into the crowd, to hide behind a pile of bales and watch until they got into the big limousine and drove away, Althea still holding his flowers tightly. Simon hurried out and jumped on to a street car, his face set and hard. As he entered the "Ritz-Carlton" the place was crowded. He struggled into his white jacket and Bill turned a perspiring smile towards him. "Say Cap! this is hotter than goin' over the top!"

From limousine to lunch wagon was a long drop.

When the noon rush was over and the place was washed down and shut up till evening, Simon went back to the boarding house and paced up and down his tiny room, bursting with joy at having really seen her, heard her voice, touched her hand, and suffering agonies of doubt as to what course of action he was to follow. He had avoided meeting any of his old college friends from a feeling of shyness. After all he hadn't actually made good yet, and lengthy explanations would only have added to the embarrassment. So all those months he had indeed been in hiding, more or less, as Mrs. Varick had said. But Althea had a right to know, and of course he would tell her. He was far from being ashamed of his success, but, well—it wasn't exactly easy to face her father and mother and say, "I run a lunch wagon for a living," even though he might have added, "It's turning out more profitable than I dared anticipate," and even though he confided his wild dreams of a United "Ritz-Carlton" ring-

ing the continent. The results would certainly be that Mr. Varick would request him to refrain from paying further attentions to his daughter until such time as the ring should be complete. That would postpone the affair almost indefinitely; and what Simon craved was either an immediate marriage or a public recognition of their engagement. This had remained a secret because it had taken place on the other side and they were both bound by different services.

"By gosh!" muttered Simon desperately, "what's a man to do? If I tell her she'll be unhappy because her father and mother won't hear of it. If I don't tell her she'll be hurt and mystified and think I'm a crook or doing something doubtful at least. . . . Still, that might be better than telling her because I can explain afterwards. . . . I don't know. Seems to me I'd better wait awhile anyway and see how things pan out."

Consequently when he called her up next morning and took her for a walk they were both so glad to be alone together that if she had not suggested that he should take her to lunch, the dreaded question of his job might never have come up. But Simon looked confused and excused himself. "Fact is," he said, "my work won't let me off between twelve and two, and I'm on again from five till midnight."

"What extraordinary hours, Simon! What sort of job is it? One might almost suppose that you were a waiter!" Althea laughed.

It was a pretty close guess, but Simon managed to join in. "No," he said, "not quite. But it is a weird game, something you'd never suspect. Look here, Al, I don't want you to ask me what it is because in an odd sort of way that I can't explain, it might come back on you. I'm making money at it, and it's honest and all that, but I just don't want to tell you until you've had time to look round a bit. Do you mind?"

Althea crinkled her nose. "I don't like anything which isn't right in the open," she said. "How long do you want to keep it dark?"

"Only a day or two," said Simon. "I loathe a hole and corner business too, but it's only till you've got the feeling of being at home again. Then I'll tell you. But to-day when you're only just back to your family I don't want you to form any hasty judgments. Will you trust me for a month longer?"

Althea slipped a hand inside his arm. "I'll try," she said. "But I don't mind confessing that my curiosity is raised to boiling point."

The big clock of the Brooks Building struck the quarter of twelve. Simon jumped. "I must go!" he said. "Can you get home all right alone, Al?"

"Go on then," she laughed. "Don't bother about me. After all Paris is a little bigger than this city. When will you call me again?"

"To-morrow morning at nine."

"Nine? Heavens what energy! Make it nine-thirty or I sha'n't have powdered my nose before breakfast." As she watched him go with huge strides that made the average pedestrian look like a Lilliputian, Althea wondered what it was about him that was new to her. He seemed in some indefinable way to have grown bigger, more mature in his manner and assurance. And yet it was only six months; curious, how short they seemed *now*, since he had left her.

Simon meanwhile got back into harness a-tingle with exhilaration. He and Bill worked through the crush hour with a snap that surprised even the regulars. Business took a jump that evening and they were kept on the go till the last of the near-beer drivers had lighted up and rumbled away. Then at about half past ten Bill clicked his heels.

"Say Cap, any objection to my going off duty?" He shifted his feet somewhat bashfully. "Fact is," he said, "I've begun keepin' steady company with a lady at the candy store."

Simon whistled. "You haven't wasted any time! All right, Bill. Slide!

Bill was already whipping off his white coat. "I'm going to settle down, if she'll have me!" he said. "This little cart's a cinch!"

"Good for you, Bill," said Simon. "I'll raise you five a week when you name the lucky day. Good-night."

Bill fumbled with the door knob, and wouldn't meet Simon's eye.

"Good-night, Cap," he said, and opened the door. Then he paused and turned. "Say, you're a brother! I'm darned glad. . . ."

"Oh, get out, Bill!" said Simon.

The door closed and the sound of running feet soon died away. Simon sat down on a stool and lighted a cigar. "Bill, too, eh?" he smiled. "Well, let's have a look at the night's takings." He pushed the button of the cash register and the drawer sprang out to his hand.

Outside in the road a big limousine came to a purring standstill by the rail. "Now," said a cheery voice. "What'll you all have?"

"Why don't we all go in?" a girl's voice was heard to say.

"Oh, my dear!" That was a protest.

"Yes, come on. It'll be rather fun!" The last remark was followed by a scramble. Two girls and two men jumped out, chattering and laughing.

As they swarmed into the "Ritz-Carlton" Simon turned on his stool.

"Althea!"

For a moment she stood very still looking at him, blocking the way for the others. Then her face broke into a radiant smile. "Why Simon!" she cried. "What fun! What a party we'll have!"

The others pushed in noisily.

"Simon? Simon Ingoldsby? What's he doing here?"

"Well by Jinks, if that isn't a sporting effort!"

They surged in, Jack Curtis and Billy Devons and Lydia Marston, whose society Simon had successfully dodged for half a year, dodged because he was foolishly afraid that they would cut him. He soon found himself shaking hands all around as though he were a long lost brother.

"Welcome to the 'Ritz-Carlton!'" he said.

"Let's lock the door," cried Althea. "Simon, lend me a white coat. I'm going to help. Isn't this the grandest fun!"

Before he could stop her she had slipped behind the counter and was pulling on Bill's garment.

Jack Curtis, whose limousine it was, helped her to button it. "Say, Simon," he said thoughtfully, "are you selling any shares in this game? I'd like to come in."

"You're a mysterious guy, Simon!" burst out Devons. "You just drop out for half a year and then we find you running your own kingdom like a resuscitated Napoleon. This is a great show. Let us three meet at my office in the morning and go into things. What do you say, Jack?"

"Sure thing!" said Curtis.

"Not you three," said Althea. "Us four!"

"What are you butting in for?" asked Curtis.

Althea took up the bread knife. "Because Simon and I are going in business together!" she said.

MEOWS FROM THE MOVIES

By ALICE GLENISTER

Hope Hampton, who has finished "The Tiger Lady," has three canaries, a pair of collies, a calf, five kittens, three Pomeranians, a pinto pony, goldfish, and a pelican. When she travels she has to hire a freight car to transport this menagerie. It's either do this or leave them behind, and this Hope refuses to do.

Gladys Brockwell has a most sympathetic rôle in her Fox production: "Rose of Nome." It is a story of the rough and rugged Northwest, peopled with characters of the same type. There is something very attractive about Miss Brockwell.

Helen Ferguson, enchanting and eighteen, says: "If you want to make a success in this world, you must do things better than the other fellow." Miss Ferguson has evidently done this, as she has advanced from small parts to leading lady, all in the short space of one year. She is doing splendid work opposite Mitchell Lewis in Metro productions.

Mae Murray has just set sail for England and "points East." She has worked steadily and consistently during the past five years without much vacationing. Europe seems to be the vacation resort for all our prominent film people.

One of the most unique and unusual pictures shown this season is the super-production of the Fox studio: "When New York Sleeps." To quote them: "Not a serial, but an eight-reel melodrama told in three stories, portraying life among the upper, middle, and lower classes of New York people. Each story is like a page from Fate's Chronicle of Life." No more appropriate or fitting explanation could be made.

Marc MacDermott, erstwhile Vitagraph star, together with Estelle Taylor, a comparatively new adornment to the screen, plays the leading part in the three pictures. Needless to remark, the work of MacDermott is consistent with his past performances, and that of Estelle Taylor most promising for her future pictures. She is assuredly a "find."

Rod La Rocque, who has been leading man for Marguerite Clark, Mae Marsh, Madge Kennedy, Mabel Normand, and several other of the screen's most popular stars, will return to the stage in late Fall. He has just completed an important William A. Brady production, taken from the famous stage play, "Life."

Florence Billings, another Vitagraph favorite of former days, has been coming back to the front lately; for instance, in "The Wonder Man," Georges Carpentier's picture. She has just completed the leading part in Herbert Rawlinson's new film, which has not yet been named.

Shirley Mason, Fox star, has stolen Dorothy Dalton's leading man from her. Doesn't it beat all how these girls scramble for the good leading men? It's as bad as Mrs. Jones trying to get from Mrs. Brown her best cook. The leading man in question is Emory Johnson, and the picture is Israel Zangwill's story, "Merely Mary Ann."

Maude Adams on the screen is a possibility of the current year. The most famous of her stage plays, "Peter Pan," is to be filmed, and it is believed that Sir James M. Barrie has released it on condition that Miss Adams play the title rôle.

We heard Eugene O'Brien remark the other day that he thought it too bad they separated him and Norma Talmadge, and voted to have them make their own pictures. We agree with Eugene. Eugene is a daily patron of the New York Athletic Club, where he keeps himself in shape to adorn his evening clothes and keep up that wonderful smile of his. We like Eugene; he is certainly a regular fellow.

William Fox, Pearl White, and the whole Fox organization should be proud, and justly so, over the first feature picture Pearl White made for that company: "The White Moll." Do not by any means fail to see it, as it is without doubt the best picture ever released by Fox, and the best thing Pearl has ever done.

One scene in particular we consider the most remarkable in any picture we have seen. Pearl, taking the part of a girl of the underworld, is discovered in a cathedral robbing the Poor-Box. An image of Christ on the Cross gradually assumes life, and this miracle transforms her whole career. It is wonderful acting.

A long time has elapsed since we have heard anything about that beautiful girl, Marion Davies, Cosmopolitan star. The last we heard, she had journeyed to California, and was busy making pictures at Santa Barbara, occupying the American Film studios. Her hair matches the California sunshine, her eyes the eternal blue of the sky, and her lips the wonderful roses of that State.

Bebe Daniels, Realart's new star, is a graduate of the comedy screen. Not so long ago this vivacious, little, blackeyed girl in abbreviated beach suits, and sometimes less, was a foil for Harold Lloyd; first in "Why Change Your Wife?" then in "Male and Female," and now in "You Never Can Tell"; which is quite true; you can never tell from the cut of a comedy girl's bathing-suit how far she will swim, or how quickly reach the goal "stardom."

A popular California resort was shocked far more than by their recent "quakes" over the bathing-suit worn by Mildred Davis, pretty opposite to Harold Lloyd. It had sleeves, skirt, and a pair of stockings. "Shocking!" exclaims California. "Why, all one could see of her was her face; we should think she would even wear a veil, dressed in a suit like that." All of which goes to show that it makes a difference where you live as to what lengths you can go.

We should rise to remark that Fritzi Brunette ought to be either an international favorite, or President of the League of Nations. Fritzi herself is French, her husband is an American, her cook's a Japanese, her maid Irish, and her dog Belgian, and we will say the Tower of Babel has nothing on her household when they all get to talking at once.

The leading dancer and entire chorus of one of New York's most successful revues were engaged for Alice Joyce's Vitagraph picture, "The Prey." Miss Joyce wears some stunning costumes, especially a negligée of lustrous silk crepe, bordered by a heavy satin stripe. She is a veteran in motion-picture making, yet is still a very young woman, and can stand a close-up incomparable.

Frank Borzage, director of "Humoresque," Cosmopolitan Films, is now with Marion Davies at Santa Barbara. Mr. Borzage promises to go himself one better. If he does he will be going some, for "Humoresque" is a masterpiece.

"As long as men have larger feet than women," says Buster Keaton, co-star with William H. Crane in Metro's "The Saphead," "woman's place will be underfoot. I believe in grinding down womankind under the resilient rubber heel." Is this caveman stuff, or just a rubber-heel ad?

The completion of his first two-reel western, "Beyond the Trail," for Brentwood, has brought Thomas Santschi the assurance of unusual success. Into the curtailed number of feet allowed him, he has put some of the finest acting he has ever done. His is the part of a hard-riding, heavy-fighting man.

Viola Dana does more than just "shimmy" in her latest photoplay for Metro, "The Chorus Girl's Romance." She does some very clever toe-dancing. Take it from Viola, to make one's shoulders behave is easier than to make one's toes perform. Incidentally, Miss Dana claims to be the only star who actually does do a toe-dance in a picture.

Did you know that William Farnum is a farmer? He digs potatoes, plants corn, 'neverything that goes with the life. In "If I Were King" he looks anything but a farmer. He is the gallant, the poet, the soldier, and the lover. He fits the character as he does his own silk tights. Walter Law, Betty Ross Clark, and Claude Payton form a cast of excellent players. Costume plays are entrancing if not too frequent.

You can't keep a good man down. Eddie Foy is going in for another try at the movies. Foy once quit the Mack Sennett outfit in a huff when he had to run the gauntlet of a custard pie barrage. It is just as well, however, that we don't have to listen to Eddie sing. With him in a picture, together with his singing—we just couldn't stand it, that's all.

Sarah Bernhardt, according to reports from Paris, may come to America to star in two picture productions. Our hat has always been off to the "divine Sarah," but we must honestly confess there are younger girls we would rather go to see on the screen. Is there a dearth of young talent that Eddie Foy, Sarah Bernhardt, and a few others should be able to fill their depleted purses at our expense?

"If your complexion doesn't look as blooming and rosy as you wish, carry a red parasol. It will light up your face charmingly," says Zena Keefe, featured Selznick player. "But unless you want to look as if you copied your facial make-up from the mummies, never carry a green sunshade." We won't, Zena; we lost a prospective husband that way once.

The NOVEMBER NUMBER

When Lovelace wrote—

"Stone walls do not a prison make,
Nor iron bars a cage,"

he was, it is true, referring to that fifth dimensional soul-plane which recks not of material confines, since, to the soul itself, there is no prison-house, either of time or place, or steel or stone. The poet might, however, have been referring to

CASEY WHISTLES

By FRANK BLIGHTON

our feature novelette for next month, an action-mystery story, and, what is more in these days of stereotyped detective yarns, the story of a man—an intensely gripping "human interest" story based not only on character-reaction, but on an amazingly original idea. Casey escapes from a prison under the very eyes of his super-watchful guards and under extraordinary circumstances which baffle them—and the reader—until the solution. You will revel in "Casey," in the simplicity of method by which he achieves his amazing get-away and what happens afterward. It is a corking yarn all the way.

The pot of gold at the end of the rainbow is a will-o'-the-wisp which has lured men from the beginning. Between him and his million there was the Girl and her secret; and behind him snapping at his heels the relentless blood-hounds of power.

NERVE

By JACK BECHDOLDT

is a super-novelette with a smashing climax which will bring you up standing. And the ending we defy you even to suspect.

Some unusual short stories also scheduled for November are:

BLUE MOLD

By KENNETH PERKINS
Author of "Tenderfoot Tarts"

THE SPUR

By GEORGE M. A. CAIN
Author of "Playwife"

The Man With His Hand in His Pocket

By SAPPER

There will be an amusing comedy by Morley Roberts entitled "Bancock's Cat," and stories by Will H. Greenfield, G. A. Wells and others.

THE PRIZE AWARDS

Owing to the unprecedented number of manuscripts received for entry in the short-story contest, it has been impossible to make the prize awards and do justice to all the contestants in time to make the announcement promised for this number. The names of the prize winners will be published in November.

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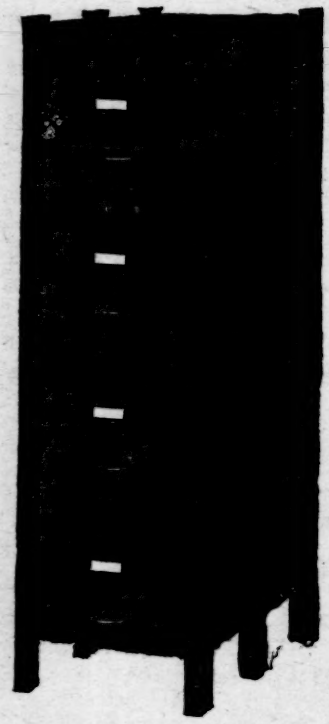

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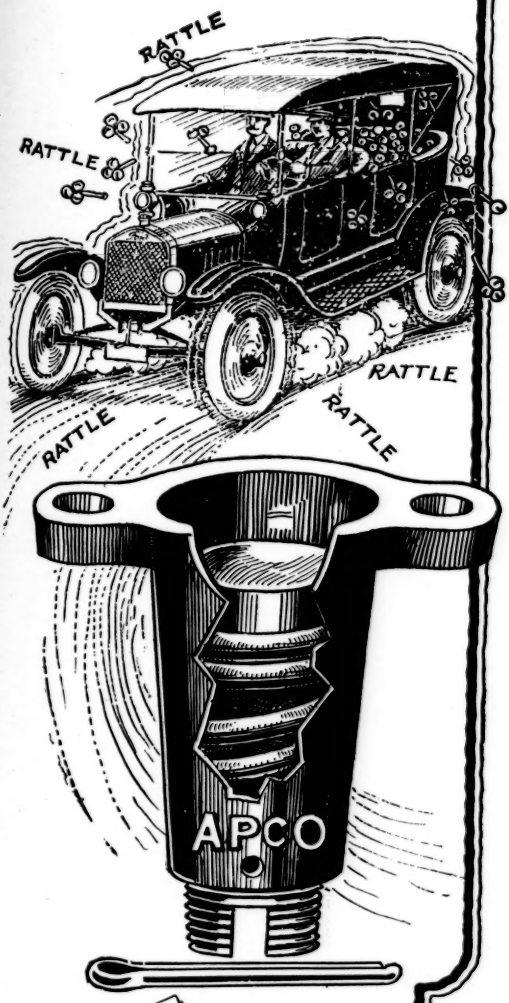

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